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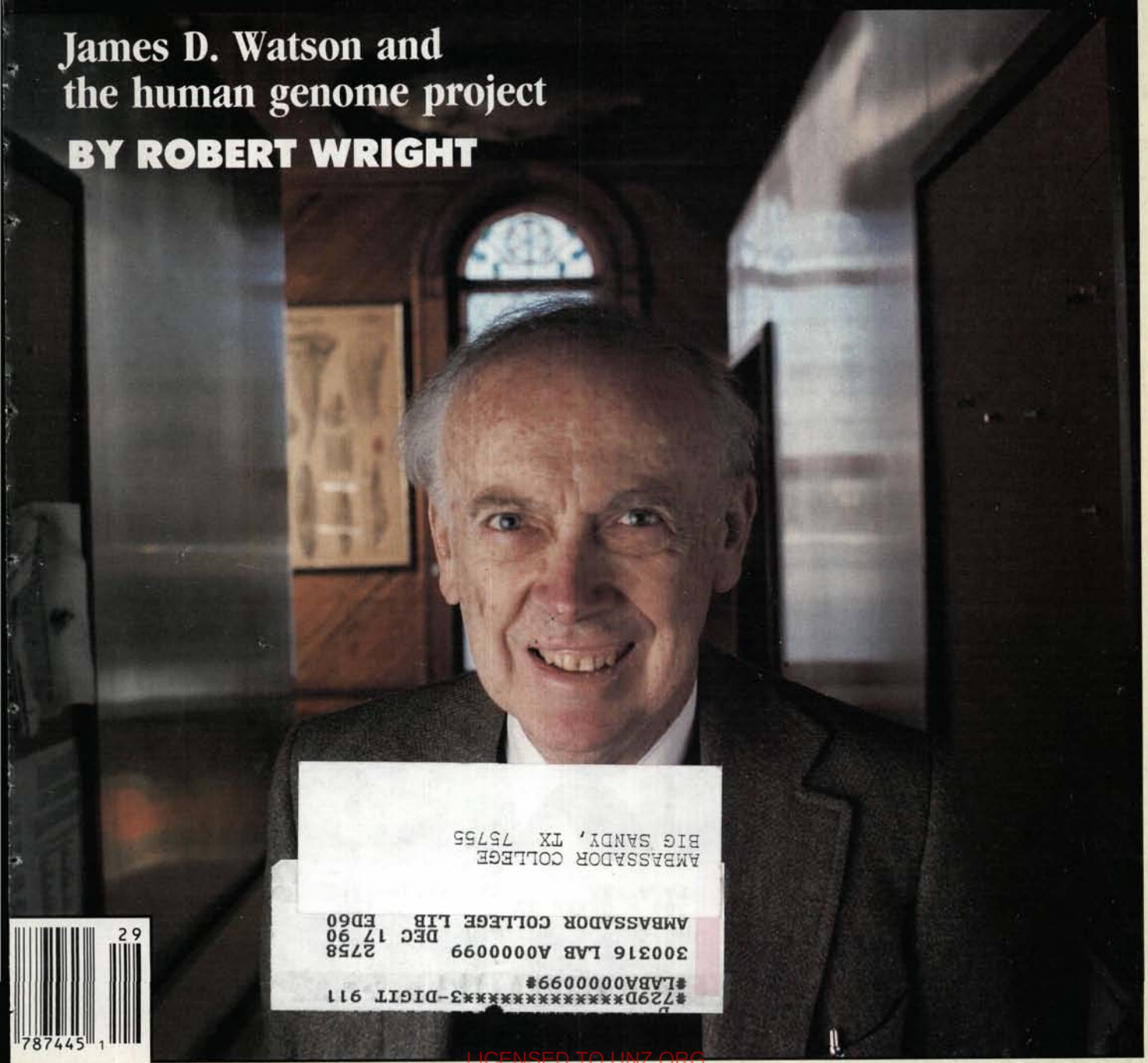
Fouad Ajami: A post-colonial paradigm · Blumenthal and Kinsley waive the flag

Mad scientist?

James D. Watson and the human genome project

BY ROBERT WRIGHT



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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JULY 9 & 16, 1990

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FROM WASHINGTON

Stars and snipes

Aren't you embarrassed? Weary and embarrassed? For the third consecutive summer, we're shouting at one another about the flag. Senator Orrin Hatch says that a nation that doesn't "protect" its flag (from what?) is surely on the decline. The truth is surely the opposite: only a nation feeling insecure about itself and its place in the world would succumb repeatedly to such a frenzy of self-righteousness about the national banner.

But supporters of a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning see it as a way of reviving the anti-liberal Kulturkampf that has been so effective in recent years. And opponents of such an amendment keep struggling because . . . because . . . why? Only William Safire (and it's easy for him, as a conservative) has had the courage to criticize "flag worship" as such. Most opponents are zealous to emphasize their own love for the flag and hatred of flag burners.

In fact, the whole debate has become deeply disingenuous. It would be an awfully staunch Democrat who didn't secretly curse the Supreme Court for not avoiding this problem by finding a tiny exception in the First Amendment. And it would be an awfully principled Republican who is not secretly grateful to have this alleged travesty to decry.

And yet some politicians, mostly Democrats, resist the flag amendment. Why? This is a question every supporter of the amendment should be forced to answer. What do they think is the motive of opponents? God knows there is no political advantage to be gained. Is it a matter of insufficient love for the flag? If opponents merely didn't care about the flag, didn't love it enough, they would hardly risk their necks opposing a law to protect it. Either opponents of the amendment must actively hate the flag and *want* to see it burned—something supporters like to imply but is too preposterous to say outright—or they are at worst guilty of a mistaken stand on principle: they love freedom too much. Which is it?

The question is worth asking because not every supporter of the flag amendment is as coolly cynical about it as President Bush. It must be almost torture for someone with as well developed a sense of the absurd as Senator Bob Dole, the designated point man, to have to wax indignant about the peril to the nation of flag burning day after day with a straight face. He almost lost it the other afternoon in the Roosevelt Room, waving a tiny flag in honor of Bush's birthday.

Some supporters need intellectual cover. Although most politicians supporting the amendment are content with patriotic boilerplate ("I pledge allegiance," he explained), a few—maybe even enough—need a serious rationale to clothe their nakedness as they proceed to enact the first-ever exception to the Bill of Rights. They need to believe they are not amending those rights themselves, just the Supreme Court's misinterpretation of them.

The clothing of choice seems to be the notion that flag burning isn't "speech" at all. Dole says, "This is not speech. This is malicious conduct." Robert Bork, in his book *The Tempting of America*, opines that anti-flag-desecration laws are aimed at proscribing not "the idea expressed" but only "the mode of expression."

The speech/conduct distinction is a staple of First Amendment theological debate. The question usually is how much the government can infringe expressive conduct while serving some legitimate purpose having nothing to do with what is being expressed. For example, can it ban all leafleting in the name of reducing litter? The courts would probably say no. On the other hand, it can forbid the use of bullhorns in the middle of the night.

As constitutional scholar John Hart Ely has explained, every act of communication—even talking, even writing, even semaphore (flags)—is both speech and conduct. What matters is the government's purpose in proscribing the conduct. Is it to curtail expression? In this case, clearly yes, though the past year has seen vast amounts of brainpower expended denying the obvious. You cannot separate the message from its "mode of expression"; it is precisely the extra punch provided by this particular mode of expression that leads people to want to make it unavailable.

The four dissenters in *U.S.* v. *Eichman*, this year's Supreme Court flag-burning opinion, miss the point here. They note that burning the flag may convey any number of messages, and they reason: "Thus, the government may . . . protect the symbolic value of the flag without regard to the specific content of the flag burners' speech." But whatever the message may be, it is a message of dissent from that symbolic value. If a flag is burned in secret, that is no threat to the flag's symbolic value. It is only when a flag burner is communicating a message that the flag's symbolic value is in any way affected.

George Will argues that all nine justices share "the mistaken belief that 'symbolic expression' is tantamount to speech." There is nothing wrong with "limiting particular forms of expression to protect particular ideas," he writes, because "the Constitution mandates agnosticism only about religious, not political, ideas." The Framers said "speech," not "expression," because "speech is intrinsically connected with reason."

I had a law school professor who used to greet arguments like this with a magnificent shrug and a wry, "Well, I hear the words . . ." No one doubts that the government can promote civic virtue by engaging in communication of its own. But can it do so by prohibiting communication that it regards as unvirtuous? And if the purpose is protecting the party line, why are we placing our anathema on what Will regards as the *least* powerful forms of communication—mere "symbolic expression"—rather than the most powerful: speech itself? (That's just a rhetorical point—not a suggestion!)

Dissenting in last year's flag case, Chief Justice Rehnquist denied that flag burning communicates anything at all. "Flag burning is the equivalent of an inarticulate grunt or roar." If so, the same is true of flag flying. One message of flag burning is: whatever you mean by flying the flag, I mean the opposite.

American politics is not fueled solely, or even primarily, by the sort of reasoned dialogue cherished by George Will. If "inarticulate grunt" describes anything in the flag debate, it is the rhetoric offered by President Bush and other politicians in support of this preposterous and humiliating amendment. Many serious people, elected officials and others, have followed the Bush "cultural values" caravan for the past couple of years, stifling their doubts and even supplying fancy intellectual justifications for the cheap politics. There are none left. Now it's testing time for those people.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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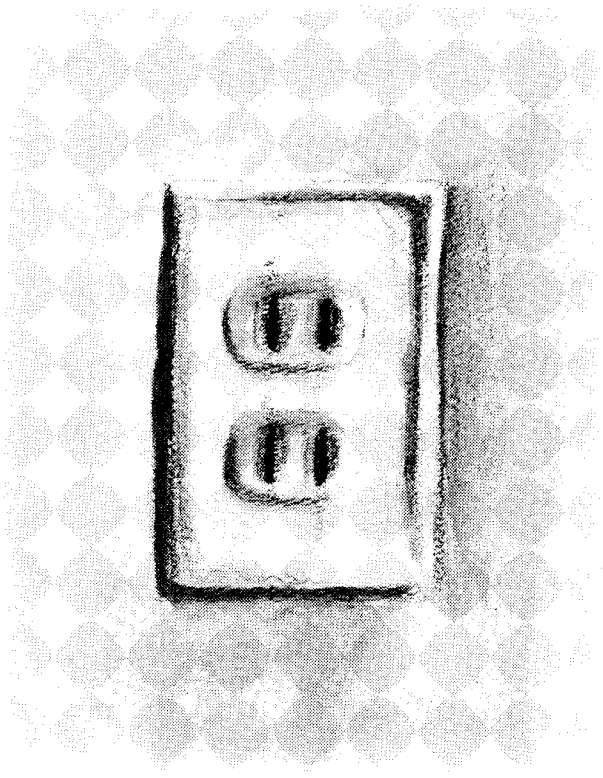

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CORRESPONDENCE

Means of dissent

To the editors:
Sidney Blumenthal is correct in taking Robert Caro to task for his simplistic good vs. evil portrayal of Coke Stevenson and Lyndon Johnson and the nature of politics in Caro's book *Means of Ascent* ("The Years of Robert Caro," June 4). However, Blumenthal, despite his awareness of the complexity and dualism of much of LBJ's character and behavior, is also too simplistic in his discussion of Johnson and civil rights. Johnson was not a racist, but he was committed to pursuing power, and the civil rights issue often meant little to him except as a means to power.

Blumenthal's quote of Johnson's March 1949 maiden Senate speech is taken completely out of context. The speech was not LBJ preaching moderation, it was LBJ, joining Southerners opposed to change in the Senate cloture rule. Southerners were fearful that such a change would permit Harry Truman's proposed civil rights legislation to be enacted into law. Johnson made it clear in this speech that he opposed Truman's proposals because they would be "depriving one minority [the white South] of its rights in order to extend rights to other minorities." LBJ argued that though he personally opposed lynching, poll taxes, and racial discrimination in employment, these were state, not federal matters.

Blumenthal is correct to say that race was not the centerpiece of the 1948 Senate campaign, but Johnson made sure that Stevenson, who was a flagrant racist, would not capture the segregationist position in the campaign. "The civil rights program," LBJ declared in a 1948 radio campaign speech, "is a farce and a sham—an effort to set up a police state in the guise of liberty." And in subsequent radio speeches he told his fellow Texans, "I voted against the so-called and misnamed civil rights bills; and I expect to continue fighting them during six years as a senator."

MARK STERN
Orlando, Florida

To the editors:
Let's assume that Sidney Blumenthal's assessment of Coke Stevenson was too kind and that in fact Stevenson was even more wretched and had no redeeming traits. What, pray tell, does that have to do with Lyndon Baines Johnson? Did not Johnson still steal the 1948 primary from Stevenson? Was not Johnson's acquisition of the license for radio station KTBC in Austin completely unethical? Did not Johnson renege on his promise to resign from office and join his constituents' sons in the trenches if war came? Johnson was despicable. Stevenson's failings made him no less so.

JOHN MCCORMACK
Dallas, Texas

Peking favorites

To the editors:
In talking about President Bush's renewal of most favored nation trade status for China in 1989 ("Playing Favorites," June 18), Jacob Weisberg states: "Last year it was extended just before the declaration of martial law and the massacre at Tiananmen Square."

In fact, Bush advocated renewal of China's MFN status *after* martial law was declared, and the Tiananmen Square murders occurred a few days after MFN was renewed. Largely ignored by the press, this shows that Bush's paramount concern about China is its ability to generate profits for American business, not the human rights abuses by its dictators.

ALLAN J. FAVISH
Tarzana, California

German engineering

To the editors:
With your June 4 editorial ("Caveat Victor") TNR has finally come off the fence on the related issues of German unification and the future of European security. Unfortunately, you have come down firmly on the wrong side. Your arguments for transforming NATO from an instrument for anti-Soviet containment into an instrument for anti-German containment are misguided and misleading. Once the Soviet troops have been removed from Central Europe, this new NATO would inevitably be perceived by the German people as an occupation force. Shortly thereafter, NATO would either become what it was perceived to be or collapse. Do the West Germans deserve this kind of treatment after developing into a model democracy, a pillar of the European Community, and a reliable NATO ally? Do the East Germans, who exhibit no signs of revanchist or authoritarian tendencies, merit this treatment? Is European security served by policies that seem designed to encourage nationalist resentments within a united Germany?

NATO, in its present form, certainly has a role to play during the present transitional period. But once the process of Soviet retrenchment from Central Europe has been completed, NATO governments should return the alliance to the form it took from 1949 to 1951. This more flexible and political NATO will prove to be a better context for trans-Atlantic consultations on security issues. It will be a more appropriate framework for integrating a united Germany into the post-cold-war European order. It will be less threatening to Moscow. Above all, it will be much better than the present NATO at cohabiting, or merging, with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in the late 1990s. All thirty-five member nations of the CSCE are in favor of giving this organization greater responsibility for European security. If NATO becomes a barrier to this goal, it could result in a situation in which the two organizations cancel each other out, at the expense of European security.

DOUGLAS STUART
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Heir apparent

To the editors:
I must take exception with Fred Barnes's assertion that "in dealing with Israel, Bush is the heir of Jimmy Carter, not Ronald Reagan" ("Pressure Points," June 18). During his first term Reagan found himself in more direct conflicts with the Israeli government than had any previous president, from the sale of AWACs to Saudi Arabia to strong criticism of Israel's conduct during the war in Lebanon.

Moreover, after the Israelis bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, Reagan imposed a temporary embargo on aircraft shipments to Israel. There were also sanctions after aerial strikes against PLO targets in Lebanon that same year. This readiness to withhold military aid from Israel was a dramatic departure from the policies of Jimmy Carter. Let's remember that the good old days weren't as good as they seemed.

GREGORY D. SLABODKIN
Baltimore, Maryland

Decrying Woolf

To the editors:
I applaud Irving Howe's efforts to make the case for Arnold Bennett's worth as a novelist ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf," June 4), and would rather reread *The Old Wives' Tale* or *Riceyman Steps* than any novel of Virginia Woolf's except *To The Lighthouse*. But a word in this connection should be said about Wyndham Lewis, whose contribution to the Bennett-Woolf affair has been overlooked. In 1934 Lewis published a book of literary and cultural criticism, *Men Without Art*, whose fifth chapter dealt with Virginia Woolf, and specifically with her attack on Bennett and the other Edwardian novelists in

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 9 & 16, 1990

GET SERIOUS

Is this a great nation we're living in or a trash TV talk show? Consider: flag burning. Art porn. Donald Trump. Self-euthanasia machines. Animal rights. Marion Barry.

Unfortunately, this stuff is not just what they talk about on Donahue to keep the ratings up. It's also what they talk about on the floors of Congress and at presidential press conferences. If the Age of Reagan was gilded and self-centered, the Age of Bush is profoundly trivial. Huge problems (debt, education, health care, competitiveness, race) are not being addressed. At best, they are being reshaped to talk-show proportions (the corporate debt problem becomes The Donald, racial tension becomes the Barry trial). Or, even worse, a non-issue is blown out of all proportion to become Topic A.

Flag burning is the crowning example. A conservative-leaning Supreme Court has twice reached the sensible judgment that burning the American flag is a form of political protest ("speech") protected by the First Amendment. But President Bush and Republican congressional leaders are campaigning for a constitutional amendment, cynically hoping to make bogus patriotism the major issue of this congressional election year. Note well: they are willing to desecrate the U.S. Constitution and deface its most precious clause, the free-speech guarantee of the Bill of Rights (and to hustle this ugly travesty through Congress by July 4), for momentary partisan advantage. This is a monstrous disgrace, and it must be stopped. But it is a diversion from matters that are *intrinsically* important.

Like what? Like the nation's economic future, which is in jeopardy. Bush's astronomical popularity ratings are based heavily on the idea that seven years of "economic recovery" will stretch on indefinitely. This perception discourages potential Democratic presidential candidates from running in 1992. And, with a few exceptions, it discourages Democratic congressional leaders from mounting serious opposition to Bush's policies.

But the Reagan-Bush economic record deserves to be systematically challenged. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan points out (see "Surplus Value," TNR, June 4), the average wage of American workers has not risen since 1970—and has actually fallen when increased payroll taxes are taken into account. For male high school graduates aged twenty-five to thirty-four, according to Frank Levy of the University of Maryland, median incomes have fallen during the past decade, from $23,000 to $20,000 (in 1989 dollars, not counting taxes). For college graduates, the median has risen—from $26,600 to $29,300—but at a much slower rate than the "American dream" has traditionally called for. The remedies improvised by American families—having fewer children, borrowing heavily, putting both parents to work—have reached their limits, and the American standard of living now is approaching stagnation.

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The same is true for the economy as a whole. The Reagan-Bush recovery was purchased with borrowed money. The federal debt tripled—not counting the $250 billion now being borrowed to bail out the savings and loan industry. Household debt went up from $1.6 trillion to $2.6 trillion (in constant dollars) from 1980 to 1990, and corporate debt went from $1 trillion to $1.6 trillion. In 1980 America was a net creditor to the world by $106 billion; in 1988 it owed $533 billion. Interest has got to be paid on all of this—a transfer of money from current producers to bond-holding creditors that buys nothing useful. And when the next recession comes along, the debt burden ensures that it will be deeper, longer, and harder to get out of than it otherwise would have been.

Social tensions are mounting—the boil burst in Bensonhurst and may yet in Louisiana—and they will get worse in a recession. So will intergenerational tensions. Young workers are not going to pay endlessly to care for older people. One of these days we'll read of a grandma who was urged by her relatives to use a suicide machine. Soon after, Oprah will do a show on the topic "Has the Right to Die Become the Duty to Die?" The underlying problem here is that medical costs are rising at double the rate of inflation, the population is aging, thirty-seven million people are uninsured, health service for the poor is collapsing, AIDS victims and drug addicts are adding to the system's burdens—and the political system says: there's no money. In fact there's no political leadership.

One key to solving many of these problems is economic growth—that is, improving industrial productivity. Straight talk from the top is also necessary—to the effect that society can really only help those who will help themselves by staying in school, postponing parenthood, working hard, and staying off drugs. Private-sector involvement is also required. Some American companies have already become deeply involved in improving individual schools. But better schools for all requires both systemic reform and more money. America's business leaders, locally and nationally, have the influence to get both.

Most important, American business needs to get down to business—and it needs some prodding from the government. American industry's productivity growth rate trails that of Japan, Italy, Britain, and France. Japan invests 22.3 percent of GNP in new plant and equipment; we invest 12.5 percent, trailing France, Canada, and Italy. This isn't their fault, it's ours. We don't save, invest, and produce; we spend, borrow, and consume. And instead of conducting real debates about real problems, we are replicating Geraldo.

Edward Luttwak observes in the summer issue of *The National Interest* that geopolitics has been replaced by "geo-economics." In the old era, he said in an interview, "our kind of goof-off behavior didn't matter much. If a missile didn't work, who cared, as long as you never had to use it? Your reputation counted. You could bluster and threaten. But now, products either work or they don't. You either have disposable capital or you don't. The penalties for goofing off have increased enormously."

Bush argues that cutting capital gains rates, a boon for rich people, will increase investment. Senator Dale Bumpers has a better idea: limiting the tax break to new investments and those held for five years or more, to encourage longer-term corporate planning. Bush exhorts the states to improve education. Representative Richard Gephardt is reviving Gary Hart's old idea for an updated National Defense Education Act to encourage young people to study math, science, and languages. He also wants to create federal incentive grants for improving SAT scores and graduation rates. Various Democrats have ideas for national health insurance or mandated health benefits, and some conservatives are pushing vouchers and tax deductions to allow individuals to purchase their own health insurance (and hence become aware of health care costs), with protections for the indigent. This proposal by the Heritage Foundation deserves debate.

So does the issue of raising taxes—both to reduce the budget deficit and to finance investments in education, health, and infrastructure. We are inclined to favor a gasoline tax, which would reduce U.S. dependency on foreign oil and stimulate alternate energy sources. The Progressive Policy Institute favors removing the income cap on Social Security taxes to finance a tax cut for the middle class.

Bush has done little to deserve his present poll ratings. He was handed the 1988 election by Democratic incompetence. Will he be handed the 1992 election as well? To all the hang-back potential 1992 candidates—Mario Cuomo, Bill Bradley, Al Gore, Richard Gephardt, Bill Clinton, Sam Nunn, Doug Wilder, Bob Kerrey, Lloyd Bentsen—we say: the country needs more from you than your self-indulgence.

TOO CRUEL, LIVE

Censorship is a stain on civilization, but it is an old story that censorship also adds an extra-aesthetic fascination to art, that it raises the artist into a hero. In truth, there are certain sorts of art for which censorship is a lucky break, particularly in an open society with a free market, in which censorship is doomed anyway to fail. The rap group 2 Live Crew is enjoying such a break. They owe a great deal to the yahoo representatives of the law in Orlando County, which declared their record "obscene" and arrested two of the group's members for performing it (and one record dealer for selling it).

About the right of 2 Live Crew to record and to perform their "music," about the right of record dealers to sell it and the right of consumers to buy it, we give no quarter: the United States is a free country and there is no expression of its culture that does not deserve the protection of its freedoms. The arrest of performers and record dealers is a shabby, frightened, un-American

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thing. In the case of 2 Live Crew it might also be a racist thing: Andrew Dice Clay has also gained fame and fortune calling women "bitches" and his record rests undisturbed in the stores.

But the First Amendment's protection of 2 Live Crew is where the discussion should begin, not where it should end. *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* is nothing if not obscene. Its subject, its only subject, is domination through sex. The rhythms and the arrangements are, by the standards of rap music, conventional; and the musical references are thoroughly banal. The innovation here is the language. The lyrics of these "songs," to a degree that is probably unprecedented in American popular music, drip with contempt for women, for black women especially. They are compared to whores and dogs. The chanting about (children, cover your parents' eyes and ears) "cunts," "dicks," "pussy," and "cocks" knows no end. These wounded sensibilities are not breaking new ground in metaphor: "forget the salad, just eat my meat" is about as subtle and as symbolic as they get.

Oh, for the days when we could make our First Amendment fights for *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The currency of cultural martyrdom has been devalued. But there are some who would not agree, and they have found a home in the pages of *The New York Times*. The paper's rock critics are regularly laughable in their nervous translations of the primal and the obscene into the polysyllabic prettifications of their trade. 2 Live Crew maintains that "I can't be pussywhipped by a dick-sucker," and Jon Pareles explains that "rappers live by their wit—their ability to rhyme, the speed of their articulation—and by their ability to create outsized personas [sic] with words." He also avails himself of the understanding of Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. of Duke University, whose marriage of post-structuralism and Spike Lee has made him the most widely cited black critic of the day. "The rappers take the white Western culture's worst fear of black men and make a game of it," Gates instructs the man from the *Times*.

Nice try. What 2 Live Crew takes is the black man's worst fear of the black woman; and if it makes a game of it, the game is not exactly fun. Racism is no more responsible for the misogyny of 2 Live Crew than anti-Semitism is responsible for the misogyny of Andrew Dice Clay (once Andrew Silverstein). A few days later Gates appeared on the *Times* op-ed page to "decode" 2 Live Crew for the millions of us who were dead to the esoteric dimensions of the work. One of the strengths of this stuff, one would have thought, is its directness, its literalness; but no, the genital madness of 2 Live Crew is "allegorical," because all persecuted people are forced to speak in codes (a Straussian reading of rap, at last!), and "parodic," because hyperbole and extravagance are a retort to the conventions of a culture. "It recalls the inter-sexual jousting in Zora Neale Hurston's novels," Gates says smugly. About the difference between jousting and wilding, Gates is silent, as he is silent about how you might impress that distinction upon the minds of kids to whom you have warmly recommended this music. (Never mind the insult to Hurston.) To understand 2 Live Crew, he concludes, we must become "literate in the vernacular traditions of African Americans."

There are mistakes of which only professors are capable, and this is one of them. The problem is not only that the professor is foolish; the problem is also that he is, intellectually at least, a counselor of despair. When you promote "suck my dick, bitch, and make it puke" into a "vernacular tradition," you wound your culture. You teach that your culture need aspire to nothing high, because the low *is* the high; and that your culture—in this instance, the culture of Ellington and Ellison—need look no further than the street. Gates's apology for 2 Live Crew is more proof of the idealization of the street that now lies at the heart of African American culture. The truth about the street, of course, is that it is the site of the greatest catastrophe to have befallen black America since slavery.

In recent years we have heard a good deal about the crisis of the black American male. There is no more definitive document of that crisis than *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*. The pathetic sexual violence of Eddie Murphy has been exceeded, and a prominent black intellectual has stepped forward to congratulate these posers, to call them victims and heroes. He, of course, is free to do so; and they, of course, are free to make their music; and we, of course, are free to be alarmed and appalled. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

SHELL CONSERVATISM

By Fred Barnes

The National Endowment for the Arts was the laughingstock of the 7:30 a.m. meeting of the White House senior staff on June 12. Officials read aloud from an article in *The Washington Times* describing proposed NEA theater grants for solo performances. One was for a woman who covers her nude body with chocolate and bean sprouts, another for a man who urinates in a toilet bowl containing a picture of Christ. Staffers shook their heads and chuckled. At 7:50 a.m., the entire group walked down the hall to the Oval Office to wish President Bush a happy sixty-sixth birthday. Chief of staff John Sununu brought along the newspaper, open to the page with the NEA article, and handed it to Bush. The president made noises of disapproval as he read, then declared the proposed grants "pretty bad stuff." After a short pause, he added, "But these are just a few out of 75,000 [NEA] grants. I sup-

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pose we should remember that."

Bush, though appalled, wasn't ready to advocate legislative restrictions on NEA grants. Contrast this with his reaction to the Supreme Court's decision on June 11 erasing the law against desecration of the American flag. An hour after the decision was released, Bush was asked if he'd pursue a constitutional amendment to protect the flag. "Absolutely," he said. "I will continue to press for what I strongly believe is in the best interest of this country." The next day Bush told Republican congressional leaders that he's "absolutely committed" and will be "vocal and visible" in the amendment fight. And that afternoon at a Rose Garden ceremony, Bush said, "I am all for free speech, but I am for protecting the flag against desecration. The law books are full of restrictions on free speech, and we ought to have this be one of them."

Bush's position on these two issues is aberrant. Run-of-the-mill conservatives favor the flag amendment and curbs on NEA. Liberals tend to oppose both. My own view is that the amendment is frivolous but that restrictions on arts subsidies are fine. But I don't know anyone except Bush who hungers for the amendment and an unfettered NEA. How did he arrive at this position? Obviously ideology didn't have much to do with it. Bush simply isn't an ideological politician. His policies are shaped by personal feelings and political instinct. In the case of the flag, it's easy to see how these two reinforced each other. Bush's visceral response to flag burning led to a politically exploitable proposal, the Twenty-Seventh Amendment. He's ready and willing to exploit it.

Not so the NEA. When Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina and other congressional Republicans began pushing for sharp restrictions, Bush balked. At a March 23 press conference, he took offense at "sacrilegious, blasphemous depictions that are portrayed by some to be art." But he argued that the job of weeding out obscene art should be left to NEA chairman John Frohnmayer. Better this "than risk censorship or getting the federal government into telling every artist what he or she can paint or how he or she might express themselves," he said. Bush misstated the issue, which involves whether Congress should regulate arts grants, not censorship. But his answer at least shows his antipathy to restrictions on the NEA. Bush loathes congressional micromanagement of any federal agency, even a small one such as the NEA.

There's another reason for Bush's position: he's not inclined to give offense to the arts community. Bush doesn't identify with performers and artists, but he does with folks on symphony boards, arts panels, community theater groups, etc. Why clash with them just to appease the Helms crowd? It wasn't until Sununu forced him to read *The Washington Times* story and congressional Republicans, particularly Newt Gingrich, lobbied him a few hours later that Bush gave in. He still prefers to have the NEA reauthorized for five years without restrictions. But he was persuaded that this is a non-starter and restrictions are inevitable. "If Congress can come up with language that is limited and reasonable, we are willing to be open and flexible," a Bush aide said.

With the flag amendment, there's no interest group that Bush fears offending. So he's going full speed ahead. The flag issue represents what an administration official refers to as Bush's "shell conservatism." On core issues—taxes, relations with the Soviets, Pentagon spending—Bush is veering away from the conservative position. But on peripheral issues that affect practically no one directly, he's rock solid. Another example is capital punishment. Bush regularly calls for expanding the death penalty. "For anyone who kills a law enforcement officer, no legal penalty is too tough," he said on May 20 while dedicating a police memorial in Portland, Oregon. "And that goes for drug kingpins who threaten a federal witness, a juror, or a judge." But how many threats are made by drug kingpins in federal cases? Not that many, I bet. And cop killers are subject to the death penalty under most state laws.

At the June 12 meeting with Republican leaders Bush was urged to jump on the flag issue. Gingrich warned that the issue would be lost if he didn't. Senate GOP leader Bob Dole and House Republican chief Bob Michel brought along small American flags. They waved them during a photo opportunity at the start of the meeting (Bush didn't wave one) and afterward, when confronted by reporters in the White House driveway. Bush needed no persuading. White House aides who are skeptical about an amendment say they're certain of Bush's sincerity. "His feelings about this are genuine," says a senior official. "I can't explain it."

Bush's favorite vehicle for expounding on the flag is a ceremony at a war memorial. When he called for a flag amendment last year (Congress enacted a statute instead), Bush went across the Potomac to the Iwo Jima Memorial to deliver his lines. This year, as luck would have it, the sculptor of that memorial, Felix de Weldon, was scheduled to present a replica to Bush in a private Oval Office session. It was moved outside to the Rose Garden and turned into a public event on June 12. "Amending the Constitution to protect the flag is not a matter of partisan politics," Bush said. "It's not a Democrat nor a Republican issue. I don't see it as either liberal or conservative. It's an American issue."

Two days later, Bush went to the Vietnam Memorial at 6:30 a.m. to witness a flag raising. June 14 is Flag Day, after all. This event had been hastily added to Bush's schedule. He presented the flag that had flown over the White House the day before to Marines, who raised it. Bush, said Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, "thought this was an appropriate and dignified way to honor Flag Day." The president made no public comments, but he didn't want his political point to be lost. Sig Rogich, his media adviser, joined him at the memorial. As Bush watched the ceremony, Rogich directed the pool TV crew to make sure it got the best angle on the president. •

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A referendum on the postcolonial state.

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

By Fouad Ajami

There are different ways of reading the defeat of Algeria's ruling party, the National Liberation Front, by its Muslim fundamentalist challengers in the recent municipal elections. By one reckoning, it was a defeat of secularism per se. The lights shall go out in Algiers. This will be Qom by the Mediterranean. It will be tough going for the women of the country, for its modernists; it will be harder to get a drink, or see a porno flick. We have been here before. The Islamicists launch a revolt of a thousand discontents. It is led first by academics, by "soft" advocates of "authenticity" (indeed, it is a philosophy professor who heads the Islamic Front for National Salvation). Then the true believers will prevail, imposing a reign of virtue and terror. Large numbers of Algerians will take to the road, particularly to France, providing Jean-Marie Le Pen with ample proof that he's been right all along in his worries about the "purity" and the future of France.

But we flatter Algeria's autocracy if we fall for this sort of interpretation. Above all this was a referendum on the postcolonial state and its entire baggage: one-party rule, the command economy, the repressive state living off the faded memories of the great anti-colonial struggle, and the cynical *nomenklatura* that talks left and lives right. This is not so much the Tale of Qom as it is a variant of the tale we have been watching in the Soviet Union, the spectacle of halfhearted reform bringing ruin in its train. And in President Chadli Benjedid there is even a Gorbachev-like figure who is playing, alternately, the role of cop and would-be emancipator. A colorless army colonel, Benjedid was thrust on the scene a decade ago by the bureaucratic-military structure of the ruling party and the army. There was nothing special about him. There were signs, though, over the course of the last decade, that he had come to understand just how deep the rot was.

The moment of truth for Algeria and Benjedid came in the fall of 1888, when riots swept the principal cities. The young took to the streets. Their grievances were bottomless: underemployment, lack of basic consumer goods, escalating food prices, the ruling party's monopoly on power and privilege. It was a ferocious revolt that targeted government buildings and state-owned property. Several hundred demonstrators were killed by the army: the state acknowledged the death of nearly 200; other estimates ran as high as 500. (Shades of China and Tiananmen Square.) But after the riots were put down, Benjedid was repentant; he told his people that he understood the message of the revolt, conceded that many of those detained were subjected to torture, promised that the state would change its ways, and help up the prospects of free elections, political pluralism, and market reforms.

Benjedid has difficult material to work with. Algeria has fallen on hard times. The country is forced to rely on imports for two-thirds of its food. The strategy of industrialization and import substitution has reached a dead end. Oil income plummeted from $13 billion in 1970 to $5 billion in 1988. The state's foreign debt now totals $30 billion, and the bulk of oil revenues are earmarked for debt servicing. Moreover, Algeria has changed in profound ways: 40 percent of its population is under the age of fifteen, and 75 percent under twenty-five. For the young urban poor and the half-educated, the legend of the ruling party and its *combattants* summoning the Algerian nation back from the world of the dead in the struggle against France is like a tale of a Thousand and One Nights. It is not their tale of their world.

Alexis de Tocqueville bequeathed us a truth that despotic regimes have yet to understand: "It is almost never when a state of things is most detestable that it is smashed, but when, beginning to improve, it permits men to breathe, to reflect, to communicate their thoughts with each other, and to gauge by what they already have the extent of their rights and grievances. The weight, although less heavy, seems then all the more unbearable." Chadli Benjedid had introduced the ballot, and left the door ajar.

Algeria shares with other Arab-Muslim societies another factor that contributed to the rise of the fundamentalists. The state, as Arabs would put it, had eaten the green and the dry; it had devoured intermediate institutions: labor unions, professional associations, political parties, the bazaar. Only Islam and its urban networks—the intellectuals, the free-lance preachers and their foot soldiers, the young urban poor—were left with any vitality. The victory of the Islamic Front in the local elections (it gained control of thirty-two of forty-eight provinces, claiming perhaps 70 percent of the popular vote and sweeping the capital city of Algiers) fits this general pattern. The secular political parties were too feeble to mount a challenge to the rulers. Thus it came down to the state and the Islamicists.

We don't know where Algeria's path leads. Benjedid could push on into uncharted waters, groping as he goes along for a mix of authoritarianism and reform. He could continue to open up the economy, as he has been doing with no great results, to domestic and foreign investors. The middle class and the newly educated yearn for a way out of Algeria's decline into further mediocrity and impoverishment, which should work to his advantage.

We have not seen the last of the ruling party's diehards. The commanding heights of the polity are still theirs. Algeria's is a centralized political system. At any time the ruling circles in the NLF could journey back into

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the political world they know best: the relative quiet of unadorned dictatorship. The victory of the Islamicists could provide the ideal pretext; the ruling party would present itself as the custodian of reason and order and things familiar. If it is the prison of the old guard or the merciless rule of the zealot, better the sultan you know than the one you don't.

Meanwhile, more and more Algerians will hammer at the gates of France as they are banished from home by the failures of the Algerian state. After the years of the anti-colonial struggle, and the 1970s, when Algeria took the lead in pushing for a "new international economic order," the masks have fallen. It is easy to see now that all those treks to anti-Western international conferences were only shopping trips for the wife and kids. Benjedid must envy his predecessors, who ruled at a time when the people were still held by political magic.

Islam will, of course, offer Algeria no way out. In Algeria today there are two forms of escape: to France and to the comfort and the haven of the past. In other words, into the world of the foreigners or the world of the ancestors. Islam can drape the failure and cover up the hurt. It can throw dust in Jean-Marie Le Pen's eyes and the eyes of the true believers. But it is a more worldly tale, and a more painful one that is playing itself out in Algiers.

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Old Glory as fig leaf.

SYMBOLIC LOGIC

By Sidney Blumenthal

The Republicans, post-Reagan, adhere to a literalist faith in the power of elemental national symbols. They brandish them as if by this ritual they could indefinitely prolong the 1980s. Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi, the Republican whip, for example, has just decried "a lack of appreciation for important symbols" to explain the need for a constitutional amendment to prohibit flag burning. Representative Newt Gingrich, the Republican House whip, echoes: "It's a very real issue because symbols matter."

By this logic, an issue exists because a sign exists, making the issue a projection of a symbol, not the symbol the reflection of an issue. Ever vigilant, Gingrich counterposes his rallying round the flag to the Democrats' support for a "European-style" family leave bill—the E-word, apparent successor in the lexicon of demonization to the dreaded L-word. All political symbols tend to the same meaning: making the opposition seem suspect. Gingrich is a mad semiotician, the modern political equivalent of the mad scientist.

Symbols matter, but what do they signify? If the flag were simply a banner of "national consensus," as the Bush administration argued in a brief submitted to the Court, the flag by definition could not be a focus of contention.

The Republicans' motive was more transparent than they might have wished. Bob Dole, the Senate minority leader, clutched a small American flag and waved it all day long, first on the Capitol steps and then in the Cabinet Room of the White House, seated next to the grinning president. If any Democrat opposed the amendment, said Dole, it "would make a good thirty-second spot."

When Senator Orrin Hatch, the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, was asked why he backed the amendment, his first response was to recite poll numbers. "Well," he said, "60 percent of the American people supported it. And 70 percent in *USA Today*." Out in Michigan, visions of flaming flags danced before the campaign manager of Representative Bill Schuette, the Republican challenger to Senator Carl Levin: "Wait'll you see some of our commercials," the manager crowed.

"It's sweaty, it's ugly, it's clichéd, it's trivial, but it's a way to put some hits on people," a Republican media consultant, a producer of negative spots for Bush in 1988, told me. "The most popular television show is about fat people falling off horses filmed by their neighbors. And the No. 1 issue might be flag burning."

In February 1989, a month after George Bush was inaugurated, the political directorate of the Republican Party convened in a private room at the Metropolitan Club, two blocks from the White House. Though Bush had won by a landslide in the Electoral College, he had had no coattails. In the closed room, a mist of anxiety clouded the aura of victory. Representatives from all the various departments of the GOP politburo were present: the campaign-hardened veterans from Lee Atwater's Republican National Committee; the Republican National Senatorial and Congressional Committees; the newly appointed White House politicos; the elite media and strategic consultants; and conservative cadres from the Free Congress and Heritage Foundations. Their task was to agree on a "wedge issue," one they could drive into the Democratic Party and further divide it. "Corruption" was the unifying theme they adopted—the corruption of the Democratic Party, symbolized by House Speaker Jim Wright, the corruption of the Democrats in the big cities, symbolized by Washington Mayor Marion Barry, and the corruption of government generally.

A year and a half later, the "wedge issue" has evaporated along with the political careers of Wright and Barry and the appearance of the HUD and S&L scandals. The flag issue, which arose in June 1989, never decided a single election, but another Supreme Court decision from that term—*Webster* v. *Missouri*—turned abortion into a

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heavy Republican liability. Finally and unexpectedly for the Republicans, the appeal of cold war conservatism turned tinny with the collapse of communism in Central Europe. Thus the wedge issue has metamorphosed into a backwater Kulturkampf: Robert Mapplethorpe, 2 Live Crew (Willie Horton with lyrics), and, of course, the flag.

For Bush, the flag is a symbol of political security. It protects him from his overall ineptitude with symbols, which had allowed Reagan to defeat him in 1980. A year ago, after the Supreme Court's first ruling on flag burning, Bush's initial response was to think of his responsibility: "I will see that the law of the land is fully supported." But two days later, after conferring with his political advisers, he stood before the Iwo Jima Memorial, a symbol of flag raising, to announce his support for an amendment barring flag burning. ("Those darn Marines, I'll tell you," he said, back in character after reading a letter from a wounded Marine calling for the protection of "the only symbol of freedom in the world.")

The latest Court decision came as he was being lashed by the right over Lithuania and the National Endowment for the Arts. The flag amendment is a device for redirecting the resentment. It is also a substitute for an agenda, a proxy for political discourse. Through it, the president arouses and mobilizes the country, but to no larger purpose.

For the Democrats, with a few notable exceptions, the issue symbolizes what the Republicans hoped it would symbolize: their fear of themselves. Hardly any Democrat who publicly supports the amendment privately believes it is anything but a piece of demagogy. They grumble among themselves about the damage done to their sense of party by Senator Alan Dixon, their deputy whip, who eagerly stationed himself at Bush's side at the Iwo Jima Memorial last June and the Vietnam Memorial this June. Yet many feel compelled to wear the flag amendment like a flak jacket so that they will not be wasted like Michael Dukakis; they abhor the intimidation they invite. Then, just as the frightful vote is nearing, their nerve has seemed to return, and they are led into the breach by two Vietnam veterans, Senator Bob Kerrey and Representative David Bonior.

The flag amendment epitomizes the Republicans' political formula: the looming threat (the L-word, the E-word); the out-of-the-mainstream Democrats who are partly the threat itself and partly too weak to resist the threat; and themselves, crusaders for American "values." The empirical meaning of "values" is whatever can be polled that serves to stigmatize the Democrats as out of the mainstream. But perhaps even the tormenting Republicans worry about falling victim to what they have set in motion. Those Republicans in the House who have made Gingrich their Robespierre mutter about whether he will betray the cause by agreeing in the budget summit to new taxes, thereby depriving them of a powerful "wedge issue." Just as the Democrats are partly motivated by fear of Bush, who is partly motivated by fear of the Republican right, the Republican right's own tribune may also be wondering if he will be trundled in a tumbril to the same guillotine where he has presided over the executions of liberal aristos. But if the blade falls on the flag amendment, would the Republicans be finally severed from their politics of symbolism?

Bush, in the meantime, maintains that none of this has to do with politics. "I know nothing about those campaign commercials," he said at a June 12 press availability at which he accepted a replica of the Iwo Jima Memorial from its sculptor. But Bush soon changed the subject to his telephone call to Nolan Ryan of the Texas Rangers (part-owner: George Bush Jr.), who had just hurled a no-hitter. "But, look, here's this guy—what's Nolan, forty-three—and just the tops. A top human being and a top performer." Nor was this all: Ryan had earned the ultimate superlative. The pitcher was, according to the president, "a great symbol." And symbols matter. •

Disavowing an impending victory.

MANDELA'S MEN

By Jacob Weisberg

When the White House announced in May that South African President F. W. de Klerk would visit Washington and meet with President Bush a week before the arrival of Nelson Mandela, Randall Robinson was livid. "No American president has ever invited a South African president presiding over an apartheid state to visit the United States. Not even Ronald Reagan," he told a press conference in Washington. "Then to do it in the face of objections and the week before Nelson Mandela comes to the United States is a demonstration of insensitivity of which I did not know George Bush to be capable."

The curious thing is that the African National Congress itself didn't object to de Klerk's visit. "Whether I go to the States before or after Mr. de Klerk makes no difference whatsoever to me," Mandela declared in response to a question about Robinson's stance. But TransAfrica, the pro-ANC lobbying group Robinson heads, wasn't about to yield the point. Legislative director Ibrahim Gassama told the South African journalist Simon Barber: "TransAfrica's reaction to de Klerk's visit is not entirely dictated by the ANC. The black people of this country don't want de Klerk." Despite Mandela's go-ahead, the South African president postponed his trip indefinitely. It remains Robinson's position that de Klerk should not come at all.

The contretemps over the visit is one of several recent instances of Randall Robinson proving more Catholic than the pope on the subject of South Africa's liberation. Since Mandela's release, TransAfrica has

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been less ready than the ANC to recognize the reality of reform in South Africa, more skeptical of de Klerk's good faith, and more insistent that additional sanctions are needed to urge negotiations along. Along with Michigan Democrat Howard Wolpe, the chairman of the House Africa subcommittee, and others in the American anti-apartheid movement, Robinson has been largely unwilling to recognize that the tide has turned against white minority rule.

Both Robinson and Wolpe, who led the fight in Congress that resulted in the passage of sanctions in 1986, have greeted the collapse of successive pillars of apartheid with yawns and shrugs. After the release of Mandela and the legalization of the ANC in February, Robinson averred that "nothing has changed in South Africa aside from the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of organizations." He pointed out that the Separate Amenities Act, which allowed the segregation of public facilities, was still in place. After de Klerk repealed the act, Robinson told the audience at one of TransAfrica's black-tie fund-raisers that the move was "a mere public relations measure for the South African government." De Klerk, he maintains, is trying to produce "apartheid with a different face." Wolpe takes the same view, asserting that even now, "Nothing fundamental has changed."

The anti-apartheid movement's disavowal of its own impending victory shouldn't come as much of a surprise. It is the mirror image of the inability in many conservative circles to acknowledge that the cold war is ending, with the West the hands-down winner. Of course, neither triumph is anywhere near completion, but South Africa, like the Soviet Union, is galloping down a path of fundamental change. Yet the sanctioneers cling to an outmoded vision of an unreformed Afrikaner police state, lest the fulfillment of their dearest wish put them out of a job. "You can detect a little existential fear," says one former State Department official. "When your bogeyman assumes human proportions, it becomes difficult to keep your movement going."

Since Robinson founded it in 1977, TransAfrica has been a powerful voice in the sanctions debate in the United States. TransAfrica organized the demonstrations in front of the South African Embassy in Washington in 1984 and 1985, during which more than 6,000 people—including former Senator Lowell Weicker and Stevie Wonder—were arrested. The protests served as a vivid backdrop for the debate in the House and Senate, which resulted in the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 over Ronald Reagan's veto. "Randall Robinson has been the 101st senator in all our debates on apartheid," said Ted Kennedy. "We could not have overridden Ronald Reagan's veto without Randall Robinson's leadership."

In theory, TransAfrica lobbies on behalf of all of Africa and the Caribbean, but no other issue has generated the interest and support that racial injustice in South Africa has. With the embassy arrests, Robinson, an articulate and dashing Harvard Law School graduate, became nationally famous, appearing regularly on the "Today Show" and "Nightline." TransAfrica's gala fund-raisers drew Washington's black elite, along with celebrities such as Arthur Ashe, Bill Cosby, Harry Belafonte, and Jesse Jackson. The group's budget grew from $70,000 to $700,000, its staff from two to sixteen. Thanks to a $350,000 grant from Reebok, which is also partially underwriting the Mandela visit, TransAfrica will soon move into its own building in Northeast Washington. The organization is treating Mandela's visit here as a celebration of its own enormous success.

Once Mandela departs, however, TransAfrica will be faced with a rapidly diminishing role. The debate about sanctions is pretty well over in the United States. Though there will be skirmishes about the appropriate time to ease and lift them, it is apparent that the process of reform in South Africa has a momentum of its own, which does not primarily depend on international pressure. Pauline Baker, an African specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says that Robinson will have a hard time if South Africa begins to fade as an issue here: "If he focused on Rwanda or the Central African Republic, where would he get the interest and support? It's going to be a hard row to hoe."

Mobilizing support and raising funds for work on other issues may be made more difficult by TransAfrica's less than glowing record as an advocate for democracy and human rights outside South Africa. Robinson's newsletter, *TransAfrica Forum*, has routinely excused the presence of Cuban troops in Angola and defended the record of the Marxist MPLA government and its president, José Eduardo dos Santos. Trans-Africa unreservedly supported Julius Nyerere's one-party state in Tanzania and was slow to criticize Mengistu in Ethiopia (though Robinson has been hostile to the government for the past several years). In the Middle East, TransAfrica has argued since 1979 that "it will no longer do to call the PLO terrorists," and recognizes Israel's right to exist within its 1947, not 1967, borders.

Its Caribbean record is no better. TransAfrica celebrated Maurice Bishop's "unique experiment in articulating and practicing participatory democracy at the grass roots and progressive social change" in Grenada shortly before he was overthrown by the U.S. invasion in 1983. According to TransAfrica's newsletter, Bishop's suppression of the press, the detention without charge of sixty political prisoners, and the harassment of independent trade unionists were reasonable responses to "legitimate security concerns." Bishop was the keynote speaker at TransAfrica's annual dinner in 1983. Robinson was enthusiastic about the Sandinistas through the 1980s. The Cuban interest section in Washington bought a table at TransAfrica's 1988 annual dinner.

Howard Wolpe is much more famous in South Africa than he is here. There, whites are liable to ask about the American politicians George Bush and Howard Wolpe. Here, Wolpe's name rings few bells outside of his Kala-

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mazoo district and Capitol Hill. He attained his South Africa notoriety in 1986, when Foreign Minister Pik Botha vilified him as "a bigger threat to South Africa than the Soviet Union" and barred a delegation he tried to lead to study the effects of sanctions. "I know of no greater enemy than Mr. Wolpe," Botha said at the time.

A trained Africanist with a doctorate from MIT, Wolpe has done a somewhat better job than Robinson of identifying himself with democratic forces elsewhere in Africa. Though he opposes UNITA in Angola, he has not apologized for human rights abuses by the MPLA or the Cubans. He argues that the United States should apply the same standards of democracy and human rights in Africa that it does elsewhere in the world. Wolpe thinks that it reflects unconscious racism for the United States to demand that the ANC forswear violence, when we didn't ask the same of the Nicaraguan contras or the mujaheddin in Afghanistan. "When the initial steps in Poland were taken, we encouraged them, but we did not think about lifting core economic sanctions until it appeared that the process was irreversible," he says.

Like Robinson, Wolpe is loath to admit that the point of no return has been passed in South Africa. In his view, the changes that have occurred are more cosmetic than real, and de Klerk, he says, is "not a liberator having a conversion, but someone responding to pressure." Although the South African government is approaching the satisfaction of conditions written into the 1986 sanctions bill, Wolpe won't advocate lifting the sanctions until the ANC sounds the all clear.

The biggest worry about both Robinson and Wolpe is their blindness to the ANC's faults. They argue that the liberal, democratic face of the organization presented by Mandela is the only one, and they brush aside questions about figures in the ANC who do not accept the principle of a free press or the legitimacy of rival parties. Given their sophisticated knowledge of African politics, Robinson and Wolpe certainly know that authoritarian tendencies reside within the ANC alongside genuinely liberal ones. But don't look to Mandela's men to delve into the ambiguities of South African politics. That would be raining on their own parade. •

Nelson Mandela's authoritarian baggage.

THE UNDERSIDE OF THE A.N.C.

By Don Caldwell

JOHANNESBURG

In the past few months Nelson Mandela—America's latest hero—has praised Fidel Castro, Muammar Qaddafi, and Yasir Arafat. Speaking in Angola, Mandela said of Cuba: "There's one thing where that country stands out head and shoulders above the rest. That is in its love for human rights and liberty." A week later in Libya he told Qaddafi: "Your readiness to provide us with the facilities of forming an army of liberation indicated your commitment to the fight for peace and human rights in the world."

It's hard to reconcile these declarations with Mandela's worldwide image as an apostle of freedom and democracy. It's true—and encouraging—that Mandela, since his release in February after twenty-seven years in jail, has repeatedly indicated a commitment to negotiating for democracy in South Africa, most dramatically in his talks with President F. W. de Klerk. But Mandela and other ANC leaders have not yet severed their longstanding ties to anti-democratic regimes. Nor have they shed their revolutionary rhetoric and ideals. Many South Africans, including those who exuberantly welcomed Mandela's release and who long for the talks to succeed, are left wondering which is the real ANC.

At a press conference the week before the ANC's landmark meeting with the government in early May, Christmas Tinto, an ANC regional official, told reporters: "We expect the majority of you to be card-carrying members of the ANC, if not all," because the ANC would like a "friendly" press. In January Werner Viljoen, the chairman of the University of Pretoria branch of Youth for South Africa, a moderate student group on Afrikaans campuses, met in Botswana with an ANC Youth League delegation from Lusaka. Led by Jackie Selebe, who is on the ANC's national executive, the ANC members were adamant about the need for media restrictions. "They were definitely in favor of government control of the press," Viljoen says. "We said we believed in a free, open press and they said, 'Yes, but if the press goes against the regime, the regime must control the philosophy of the press.' It really felt like you were talking to the Conservative Party."

DON CALDWELL, author of *South Africa: The New Revolution* (Free Market Foundation Books), is the managing editor of *Frontline* magazine, an independent monthly published in Johannesburg.

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These are not isolated sentiments. They represent views that stem from the ANC's own constitutional guidelines. When the guidelines were released in August 1988, the ANC was applauded for its commitment to non-racial, multiparty democracy. The guidelines call for a universal franchise, the right to form political parties, and freedoms of association, thought, worship, and the press. But these democratic rights are not quite inalienable. They are "subject to clauses," among which are:

> (i) The state and all social institutions shall be under a constitutional duty to eradicate race discrimination in all its forms;
>
> (j) The state and all social institutions shall be under a constitutional duty to take active steps to eradicate, speedily, the economic and social inequalities produced by racial discrimination;
>
> (k) The advocacy or practice of racism, fascism, nazism or the incitement of ethnic or regional exclusiveness shall be outlawed.

The guidelines go on to say that freedom of thought and the press shall be guaranteed "subject to clauses (i) and (k) above." And all political parties can exist if they "conform to the provision of (i) to (k) above."

Thus equipped, an ANC government could consider itself to have a mandate to outlaw the National Party (declaring it racist, for having implemented apartheid, and fascist, for having outlawed the ANC); the right-wing Conservative Party (racist and fascist, for calling for white domination and white schools); the neo-Nazi AWB, or Afrikaner Resistance Movement (racist, fascist, Nazi); and the liberal Democratic Party (racist, for having participated in the segregated white Parliament; fascist, for criticizing communism and supporting capitalism; and inciters of regionalism, for supporting a federation). That would eliminate all white opposition.

The ANC also could ban its radical black opponents, the Pan-Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness movement (racist, because they believe in black leadership); all parties in today's Indian and Coloured houses of Parliament (racist, ethnically exclusive, and fascist for having participated in an apartheid structure); and all homeland parties, such as KwaZulu chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha movement (ethnically and regionally exclusive, fascist). The government could also gag any newspapers that support any of those parties.

The ANC is a diverse movement, and not everyone who marches under its banner would agree that an ANC government should outlaw its opponents. But many do. Viljoen says that the delegation he met in Botswana declared that "the constitutional guidelines exclude some political ideologies. They specifically said they would ban the NP, the CP, the AWB, the PAC, and Inkatha. . . . But, in their defense, some of the younger delegates were clearly uncomfortable about this. I'd say there was general agreement on the need for banning, but there was not specific agreement on which groups would be banned."

One group that would not be banned under an ANC regime is the South African Communist Party. Since the ANC itself was unbanned—that is, legalized—on February 2, and Mandela walked free nine days later, the movement has shown no sign of breaking its partnership with the SACP—the "people's alliance," as ANC T-shirts and literature call it. The Communist Party is a secretive movement, so it is not clear how many top positions in the ANC are held by Party members. The respected London-based newsletter *Africa Confidential* estimates that, just before Mandela's release, only eight of the thirty-five members of the ANC's national executive were not in the SACP.

The ANC has not downplayed this affiliation. "The alliance between the ANC and SACP demonstrates the centrality of the working class in the national liberation struggle," Jay Naidoo, the leader of COSATU, the ANC-aligned trade-union federation, told the leftist magazine *New Era* last year. "We reject attempts by imperialists and liberals to undermine this alliance." Mandela, speaking at a rally two days after his release, said: "I salute the South African Communist Party for its consistent and determined contribution to the struggle for a democratic government in South Africa. Our alliance is built on the unshakable foundation of our united struggle for a non-racial democracy." Communist Party chief Joe Slovo, a member of the ANC's national executive, was at Mandela's side during the ANC's three-day talks with the government in May. Hammer-and-sickle banners drape the stage of every ANC rally.

Supporters of the ANC argue that it cannot be expected simply to cut its historical ties to the SACP, which has fought side by side with the ANC against racism. But it was one thing for the ANC to align itself with an authoritarian movement because both were fighting the same enemy; today, with white rule clearly on the way out, the issue in South Africa is what you're fighting *for*. And on that issue, the SACP continues to exert a strong influence on the ANC. Walter Sisulu, released from prison last year, has restated his support for "scientific socialism." Another ANC veteran, Govan Mbeki, has called for the "popular and democratic transformation" of the liberal University of the Witwatersrand. "It must be understood," Mbeki said, "that the precepts of a liberal ideology are not necessarily music to the ears of the masses whom the university must serve."

Although the South African opposition is markedly diffuse, the ANC continues to portray itself as the sole legitimate opponent of the government. ANC representatives regularly call for a two-sided negotiating table consisting of the ANC and the government. In an April editorial in *The New Nation*, an ANC-supporting weekly, Zwelakhe Sisulu, a former Nieman fellow, wrote: "It is imperative that once genuine negotiations start, there

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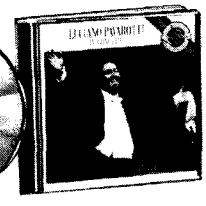

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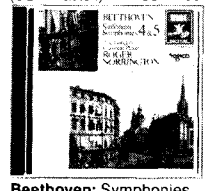

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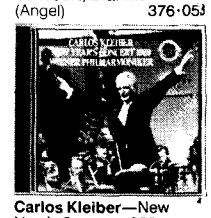

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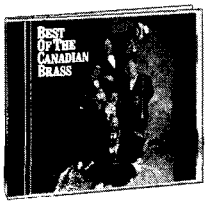

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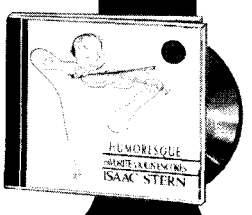

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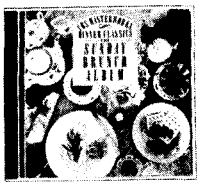

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should be two positions on the table—that of the people and the regime. In this respect the maximum unity of all those opposed to apartheid is central. . . . In our struggle, we can no longer afford to have gray, undefined areas. Now, more than ever before, it is the people or the regime." Referring to Buthelezi, Chris Hani, the leader of the ANC's armed wing, has said: "So far we are seeing him to be on the other side . . . but we will talk to Buthelezi and tell him his place is with us." Aziz Pahad, an ANC executive member, has said about the other homeland leaders: "We have to work toward ensuring that we pull them out of the enemy camp and into the democratic camp."

Mandela too appears to believe that only the ANC can speak for "the people." It is his custom in his speeches to thank all those organizations that have fought apartheid—and who are aligned with the ANC. There is rarely a mention of rival black groups, liberal white groups, or anti-apartheid business leaders.

What the ANC can't achieve by persuasion, it is attempting to achieve by violence. Mandela and the ANC say their armed struggle is simply a response to the continuing violence of apartheid. But the issue is not so simple. An armed struggle will never topple the powerful regime. What it does is provide a banner under which violence and thuggery can be carried out by ANC supporters—in the name of the struggle. The ANC's goal, critics say, is to intimidate people into siding with it, while publicly pretending that violence is directed only against the government. Mandela has recently criticized the "undisciplined violence" of youthful ANC supporters who are fighting political opponents, such as Inkatha in Natal, the PAC in urban townships, and black officials who collaborate with the government. He said he supported only the "disciplined violence" of the ANC's army against the government. But Mandela's distinction is easily lost on wide-eyed supporters on the ground. At a large Durban rally in February, Mandela called for an end to the civil war in Natal. Then he ended his speech by saying: "It is only the united action of you, the people, that will ensure that freedom is finally achieved. I call, therefore, for an all-round intensification of our struggle." Whatever Mandela means by that, for too many young comrades it means it's still open hunting season on political enemies.

Liberal critics of the ANC are also not reassured by the zeal with which the movement calls for state control of social and economic life. It has pledged either to nationalize or strongly regulate the economy. Its constitutional guidelines call for plans for a "rapid and irreversible redistribution of wealth"—along with plans to promote "the habits of non-racial and non-sexist thinking," plans to promote "anti-racist behavior," and plans for "acquisition of genuinely shared patriotic consciousness." In fact, in its rhetoric of all-embracing political, economic, and social control, the ANC sometimes sounds eerily like the old National Party.

The strain of authoritarianism in the ANC is, alas, far from foreign to South Africa's political culture. Indeed, were the ANC to take power tomorrow it would find ready at hand all the administrative tools needed to consolidate a state-socialist regime, courtesy of today's white government. The Nationalists would bequeath a range of nationalized monopolies: the national airline, harbors, railways, post office, telephone service, utilities, broadcast services, and weapons manufacturers. The ANC would inherit the Directorate of Publications, to censor books and movies; a centrally imposed school curriculum; and a TV news monopoly. To keep opponents in line, it would have the security police and the Internal Security Act. There are dismal precedents for this in Africa. At independence in 1980, Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe inherited Ian Smith's state of emergency and has renewed it like clockwork every six months. The Rhodesian secret police, the Central Intelligence Organization, was retained to torture and harass opponents of the new government. Economic restrictions—price controls, currency controls, import controls—were retained and in most cases tightened.

Lately the ANC has shown hopeful signs of some movement away from its old agenda. In an interview with *The New Nation* in April, an ANC constitutional expert, Albie Sachs, stated: "The question of strong local government is very important—it's a demand that has emerged from the democratic movement, and, in that sense, we don't want a remote, bureaucratic, over-centralized state." Yet this does not jibe with the ANC's constitutional guidelines, which state that the legislative authority is to rest solely with the central government. In the ANC publication *Sechaba* the ANC has traditionally mocked liberal parliamentary democracy, calling instead for a "revolutionary people's assembly . . . capable of defending the new state of people's democracy against racist and imperialist counterrevolution." If ANC thinking on local government has truly changed, Sachs or another ANC representative needs to say so.

In May Thabo Mbeki, Govan's son and the ANC's foreign affairs spokesman, speaking to the Cape Town Press Club, said that the ANC does not consider itself the sole representative of the oppressed, and that other anti-apartheid organizations should be represented at the negotiating table. And in an interview after the government unbanned *Sechaba*, Francis Meli, the paper's outgoing editor and a member of the ANC national executive, said: "I do not subscribe to the view that only the ANC should have the right to spread its ideas in the new society." Although Meli added that the propagation of racism and tribal chauvinism would be banned under an ANC regime, these statements are welcome. But they are also lacking in specifics. Which anti-apartheid organizations, for instance, should be represented in negotiations? Only those aligned with the ANC? And who else would have the right to spread ideas? Or would that right be granted by the ANC?

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Similar questions surround the National Party's commitment to reform. The pessimistic view is that for all the latest changes (legalizing all political movements, easing many press restrictions, and calling for privatization, deregulation, decentralization, and a bill of rights), the NP hasn't really budged. It remains an illiberal party that distrusts private enterprise and democracy. If that is the case, it can be expected to do whatever is necessary to retain power, including striking a deal with the ANC. Hand in hand, the two parties could divide the spoils of a state-socialist government. The racist laws would go, the authoritarianism would remain. The more optimistic view is that the NP is evolving into a liberal party that would not accept tyranny from the ANC or anybody else. It could open its membership to all races and form the nucleus of a moderate, pro-capitalist party that promises stability, law and order, and Western freedoms.

Whatever the true colors of the NP and the ANC, both face an enormous, diverse electorate. Some blacks are suspicious of the influence of the Xhosa (the tribe Mandela and other leaders came from) in the ANC. There are also conservative black churches that reject communism; black business owners who reject socialism; and ordinary blacks who are fed up with boycotts and township violence. Both movements need to seek support not only from South Africa's 30 million blacks, but also from the sizable non-black population: the 5 million whites, the 3 million mixed-race Coloureds, and the 1 million Indians. The Coloured community is 90 percent Afrikaans-speaking. Many Coloureds, though bitter about their humiliation under apartheid, are nervous about a revolutionary black government. And many Indians reject the ANC's anti-capitalism and fear the persecution Indian traders and professionals have suffered in places like Kenya and Zambia.

Both the National Party, for so long the world's polecat, and the ANC, for so long the assumed liberators of the people, have yet to move boldly beyond their traditional followings. The support of South Africa's ordinary people is still up for grabs. •

Mr. Huxley, Mr. Darwin: meet Dr. Watson.

ACHILLES' HELIX

By Robert Wright

"In England, if not everywhere, most botanists and zoologists were a muddled lot. . . . That was not to say that the geneticists themselves provided any intellectual help. . . . All that most of them wanted out of life was to set their students onto uninterpretable details of chromosome behavior or to give elegantly phrased, fuzzy-minded speculations over the wireless on topics like the role of the geneticist in this transitional age of changing values." —James D. Watson, *The Double Helix*, 1968

One could encounter James Watson for the first time and not immediately think: "Oh, James Watson—the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who revolutionized biology in 1953 by discovering the structure of DNA." One could think instead, "Oh, a deranged person."

Watson's eyes are intense and bugged out yet unfixed; they wander cryptically as he talks, floating from one point in the visual landscape to another and another. His head floats slightly, too, so that altogether he conveys the sort of ethereal detachment that typically signifies either profound inner peace or utter disorientation. And then there's the inappropriate laughter. At times his laughs—quiet, sudden nasal or guttural exhalations—come almost as regularly as the ends of his sentences, but most of them don't follow observations that would strike the average person as funny, and many are entirely inscrutable.

For example, he is asked about the Huxleyian potential of the human genome project, which he heads. The project is an attempt to read all the human chromosomes at their highest level of resolution, listing the whole encyclopedia-length recipe for making a human being. But won't such intimate knowledge of our genes eventually lead well beyond an assault on the sort of clear-cut disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease, that Watson is always stressing? Won't parents end up using biotechnology to ensure that their babies have higher than average intelligence or athletic ability? Watson says: "I think knowledge is going to come out and people are going to use it, but I don't know what sort of knowledge [laugh] will come out. I know some people are excessively shy. And, you know, you can have a shy child and you can have an unshy child. And I don't know [laugh] what's different about your brain and whether you would, you know, society would ever get to the point where you try some form of selection for something like that. I think—I doubt we'll be doing that for

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so long I'm not going to think about it [double laugh]. I think there'll be a great diversity of opinions between people on sort of what is an unacceptable genetic disease [laugh]."

Obviously, Watson isn't crazy. His appearance and manner can easily be interpreted as merely an extreme variant of professorial eccentricity. And when you're in his presence, soaking up his mystique, aware that he produced what is perhaps the most important insight in biology since Darwin's, that is the way you interpret them. Still, there are aspects of his oddness that have long kept colleagues wondering, if not about his actual sanity, then about just exactly what frequency he's on.

First, there is his famous reluctance to exercise discretion in communication. On a recent PBS documentary about the genome project, for example, he explained why the National Institutes of Health's Center for Human Genome Research, which he directs, shouldn't be subordinate to the Department of Energy, which has a genome program that, though half the size of the NIH program, is technically considered its co-equal. The DOE, Watson noted, is "really an organization of physicists and not biologists. And physicists have immense egos and they think they can do biology better than biologists. But I've tended to find that some physicists can be rather stupid when they have to think about biology." One can imagine ways of making roughly the same point without antagonizing an entire discipline.

Among Watson's other aberrations is a seeming confusion about his role in the world—specifically, a failure to understand that he's not running it. This recognition typically dawns on even the most ambitious and successful people by early adulthood, but nothing can stave it off as effectively as clinching a Nobel Prize at age twenty-four. Last year Watson started an international controversy by complaining that Japan wasn't doing its share for genome research. He told Congress that it should treat Japan as "the enemy" if it didn't mend its ways, and threatened to withhold U.S. research results from the Japanese. Now, this would basically mean keeping scientific data out of the public domain—which is to say, removing it from the realm of science. Watson would have to forbid scientists at universities all across America to publish their results (or, at the very least, forbid them to share data with foreign colleagues prior to publication, as scientists commonly do). No one seems to know where he got the idea that it's within his power to do this.

Notwithstanding the various grounds for labeling Watson a screwball, everything he does seems to work, even things involving political skill. After conquering DNA, he went to Harvard and started a molecular biology lab still remembered for its accomplishment and sheer energy. Then he took over the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in Long Island and transformed it from an also-ran into a world-class research institution. It's a strange phenomenon: kind of like Rambo getting appointed secretary of defense and then putting on a suit and doing a great job. Some people—even people who know Watson fairly well—say they don't quite understand it. But Watson doesn't say that. What he says is that he has often thought of titling his eventual autobiography "Calculated Bizarreness," or perhaps "Calculated Madness."

One reason Watson's judgment and character matter is that the Human Genome Project is probably the most politically delicate, and arguably the most important, government science program since the Manhattan Project. It is often mentioned in the same breath with various "big science" projects—the superconducting supercollider, the space station. In financial terms it's much smaller than these two ($3 billion over fifteen years, vs. $6 billion and more than $20 billion, respectively), but in economic and social significance, it's much bigger. Even if the eventual impact of genome research falls toward the low end of current estimates, it will have lots of fallout, both good and bad. It will (*a*) bring new dimensions to health care and spawn new medical industries (in which the United States stands to be a world leader); (*b*) substantially erode the whole idea of health insurance, in the process raising theoretically simple but practically intractable civil liberties questions about how the information in a person's genes may be used; (*c*) significantly complicate the ethics of human reproduction.

And if the project's impact is closer to the high-end estimate, that means Brave New World. Salvador Luria, the renowned biologist who was Watson's Ph.D. adviser at the University of Indiana (and who told a journalist years ago that the young Watson was "even more odd then than later"), wrote a letter to *Science* magazine last year denouncing the genome project. He warned about "the possible emergence of an establishment program to invade the rights and privacy of individuals . . . under cover of beneficent eugenic intervention. Will the Nazi program to eradicate Jewish or otherwise 'inferior' genes by mass murder be transformed here into a kinder, gentler program to 'perfect' human individuals by 'correcting' their genomes in conformity, perhaps, to an ideal, 'white, Judeo Christian, economically successful' genotype?" The genome project, Luria charged, "has been promoted without public discussion by a small coterie of power-seeking enthusiasts." No names were given.

Luria's fears are probably misplaced, but they're not overblown. The most likely Brave New World danger, as we'll see, isn't from the latent Nazism he fears. But the danger that *is* most likely is every bit as creepy, perhaps creepier, and it could well take distinct shape before the end of the decade.

You couldn't have designed a more fitting culmination to James Watson's career than his current job. In discerning the structure of DNA in 1953, he and his collaborator, the British physicist Francis Crick, established that our hereditary information is written in a four-letter alphabet. Running along either side of a DNA molecule is a very long sequence of four bases—

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guanine, cytosine, adenine, and thymine—whose order continuously varies: GCATGTATCCTGTA etc. A typical gene encompasses tens or hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of these "letters," and there are thought to be around 100,000 genes scattered along the chromosomes. The key to the meaning of the letters is the genetic code, discovered in the 1960s. A given three-letter sequence, when "read" by the cellular machinery (after being copied onto an RNA molecule), will generate a particular amino acid. GCA, for example, equals the amino acid alanine. A lot of amino acids strung together amount to a particular protein. And proteins (to oversimplify just a bit) are us. They not only form much of the fabric of life (such as cell membranes) but control it. Most hormones, for example, are proteins, and their release is mediated by DNA within cells in the endocrine glands. (Your skin cells, hair cells, brain cells, etc., all have the same DNA, but in different kinds of cells, different parts of it get activated.) The genome project aims ultimately to do what in 1953 Watson assumed would never be technologically possible: actually list in sequence all the letters that make and maintain a human body—the entire twenty-three-chromosome, three-billion-letter text; the whole human genome.

The project is commonly compared, by Watson and other boosters, to the Apollo mission; it is said to be "biology's moon shot." But this is basically a marketing ploy, designed to stir the adventurous impulses of taxpayers and to convince Congress that full funding is essential. Had the Apollo astronauts failed to go those last few miles and reach the lunar soil, the whole thing would have been judged a colossal waste. So too with other genuine "big science" projects: if the supercollider is abandoned just short of completion, it will have been a boondoggle. But if the genome project succeeds only in reading 75 percent of the genome, or 50 percent, or even 25 percent, it could still be 80 or 90 percent successful. The reason is that scientists aren't reading the genome from end to end; for now, at least, they're being selective, reading the most interesting parts. So by the time the project is half way to its goal, they may have read most of the major "disease" genes and the most conspicuously important of the other genes, and be seeking medical applications. Indeed, they may by then have read *all* the genes. The reason is that the genes, by most current reckoning, constitute less than 10 percent of the genome. The rest of the DNA is "junk." Either it is an irrelevant byproduct of evolution or it serves some function, such as regulating the expression of the genes, not yet clearly understood.

Actually, large benefits can come from genome research without *any* gene really being *read*. Typically, before the letters constituting a gene are listed—before the gene is "sequenced"—it is "mapped." That is, its location is roughly determined, usually through the study of families within which a particular trait is found. The cystic fibrosis gene wasn't sequenced (or even *precisely* mapped) until last fall. But scientists already knew the general region on chromosome 7 within which it lies. And this was enough to produce a somewhat useful diagnostic test, one that could tell *some* expectant mothers—those who had already had a child with the disease—whether their next child would have it, giving them the option of abortion. Going further, and sequencing a disease gene as well as mapping it, often makes for a more definitive, more widely applicable diagnostic test.

Scientists don't need Watson, or anyone else, to tell them to look for the cystic fibrosis gene, a fact that highlights the other big difference between the genome project and genuine "big science": genome research doesn't *have* to be highly centralized. Geneticists, left to their own devices and given enough money, will naturally converge on interesting and important genes—genes that firmly underlie a specific disease, or perhaps bear a statistical correlation to a complex behavioral tendency, such as alcoholism. Long before the NIH's Center for Human Genome Research was created in 1989, NIH was subsidizing genome research, including the successful hunt for the Duchenne's muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis genes. The creation of the center was a probably justified bureaucratic reorganization and a certainly crafty political move, not the inauguration of a long voyage.

Obviously, the project requires *some* centralization. You need someone watching over the grant process, minimizing redundant research. And you need good data bases—an accessible repository of mapping and sequencing results and other relevant information, as well as a coherent synthesis of all the results. Beyond that, the rationales get more debatable. Although there definitely should be something centralized enough to warrant the name *the human genome project*, valid arguments persist over whether the project calls for a major bureaucratic empire and the

CCCTGTGGAGCCACACCCTAGGGTTGGCCA
ATCTACTCCCAGGAGCAGGGAGGGCAGGAG
CCAGGGCTGGGCATAAAAGTCAGGGCAGAG
CCATCTATTGCTTACATTTGCTTCTGACAC
AACTGTGTTCACTAGCAACTCAAACAGACA
CCATGGTGCACCTGACTCCTGAGGAGAAGT
CTGCCGTTACTGCCCTGTGGGGCAAGGTGA
ACGTGGATGAAGTTGGTGGTGAGGCCCTGG
GCAGGTTGGTATCAAGGTTACAAGACAGGT
TTAAGGAGACCAATAGAAACTGGGCATGTG
GAGACAGAGAAGACTCTTGGGTTTCTGATA
GGCACTGACTCTCTCTGCCTATTGGTCTAT
TTTCCCACCCTTAGGCTGCTGGTGGTCTAC
CCTTGGACCCAGAGGTTCTTTGAGTCCTTT
GGGGATCTGTCCACTCCTGATGCTGTTATG
GGCAACCCTAAGGTGAAGGCTCATGGCAAG
AAAGTGCTCGGTGCCTTTAGTGATGGCCTG
GCTCACCTGGACAACCTCAAGGGCACCTTT
GCCACACTGAGTGAGCTGCACTGTGACAAG
CTGCACGTGGATCCTGAGAACTTCAGGGTG
AGTCTATGGGACCCTTGATGTTTCTTTCC
CCTTCTTTTCTATGGTTAAGTTCATGTCAT
AGGAAGGGGAGAAGTAACAGGGTACAGTTT
AGAATGGGAAACAGACGAATGATTGCATCA
GTGTGGAAGTCTCAGGATCGTTTTAGTTTC
TTTTATTTGCTGTTCATAACAATTGTTTTC
TTTTGTTTAATTCTTGCTTTCTTTTTTTTT
CTTCTCCGCAATTTTTACTATTATACTTAA
TGCCTTAACATTGTGTATAACAAAAGGAAA
TATCTCTGAGATACATTAAGTAACTTAAAA
AAAAACTTTACACAGTCTGCCTAGTACATT
ACTATTTGGAATATATGTGTGCTTATTTGC
ATATTCATAATCTCCCTACTTTATTTTCTT
TTATTTTTAATTGATACATAATCATTATAC
ATATTTATGGGTTAAAGTGTAATGTTTTAA
TATGTGTACACATATTGACCAAATCAGGGT
AATTTTGCATTTGTAATTTTAAAAAATGCT
TTCTTCTTTTAATATACTTTTTTGTTTATC
TTATTTCTAATACTTTCCCTAATCTCTTTC
TTTCAGGGCAATAATGATACAATGTATCAT
GCCTCTTTGCACCATTCTAAAGAATAACAG
TGATAATTTCTGGGTTAAGGCAATAGCAAT
ATTTCTGCATATAAATATTTCTGCATATAA
ATTGTAACTGATGTAAGAGGTTTCATATTG
CTAATAGCAGCTACAATCCAGCTACCATTC
TGCTTTTATTTTATGGTTGGGATAAGGCTG
GATTATTCTGAGTCCAAGCTAGGCCCTTTT
GCTAATCATGTTCATACCTCTTATCTTCCT
CCCACAGCTCCTGGGCAACGTGCTGGTCTG
TGTGCTGGCCCATCACTTTGGCAAAGAATT
CACCCCACCAGTGCAGGCTGCCTATCAGAA
AGTGGTGGCTGGTGTGGCTAATGCCCTGGC
CCACAAGTATCACTAAGCTCGCTTTCTTGC
TGTCCAATTTCTATTAAAGGTTCCTTTGTT
CCCTAAGTCCAACTACTAAACTGGGGGATA
TTATGAAGGGCCTTGAGCATCTGGATTCTG
CCTAATAAAAAACATTTATTTTCATTGCAA
TGATGTATTTAAATTATTTCTGAATATTTT
ACTAAAAAGGGAATGTGGGAGGTCAGTGCA
TTTAAAACATAAAGAAATGATGAGCTGTTC
AAACCTTGGGAAAATACACTATATCTTAAA
CTCCATGAAAGAAGGTGAGGCTGCAACCAG
CTAATGCACATTGGCAACAGCCCCTGATGC
CTATGCCTTATTCATCCCTCAGAAAAGGAT
TCTTGTAGAGGCTTGATTTGCAGGTTAAAG
TTTTGCTATGCTGTATTTTACATTACTTAT
TGTTTTAGCTGTCCTCATGAATGTCTTTTC

The DNA sequence for a single blood protein of hemoglobin—about one two-millionth of the human genome

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anointment of a celebrated genius as czar.

So how did Watson get to be czar? The same way he got to the heart of DNA: a combination of brains, ambition, and serendipity. By the mid-1980s the Department of Energy's ostensible mission of making nuclear weapons and implementing energy policy was sinking on the nation's agenda. Someone there had the resourcefulness to ask Congress for lots of money to do the human genome project. This spurred Watson and a few other heavyweight biologists to get involved and insist on a prominent role for NIH, the main source of government funding for molecular biology. By the spring of 1987, he and the biologist David Baltimore were visiting members of the House and Senate appropriations committees and talking up the genome project, among other NIH priorities.

Watson felt from the beginning that the project should have a powerful leader. "I argued," he wrote in a recent article, "that one person had to be visibly in charge and that only a prominent scientist would simultaneously reassure Congress, the general public, and the scientific community that scientific reasoning, not the pork barrel, would be the dominant theme in allocating the soon-to-be-large genome monies." At the time, he recalls, he never dreamed he'd be considered for the job. There is a divergence of opinion among scientists as to the plausibility of this claim.

Watson did have some competition for the spot. Baltimore, also a Nobel laureate, had been mentioned. But Baltimore was just being drawn into a controversy over the integrity of data in a paper he had co-authored. The data wasn't Baltimore's, but there was no telling how widely the stain would spread. Besides, Watson, for all his idiosyncrasies, had his strong points. He has heroic stature in the eyes of many congressmen. And even though he wouldn't win a "Mr. Congeniality" trophy from his colleagues, they respect his intellectual judgment. What's more, they know they can count on him to exercise it: if forced to choose, say, between calling an idea stupid and staying on good terms with its originator, he will seldom hesitate. In the spring of 1988, James Wyngaarden, then director of NIH, offered him the position.

Long before Watson got the job, back when he first started agitating for the genome project, he faced a problem: some of the best people in genetics weren't enthusiastic. And with good reason. In its earliest, crudest form, the human genome project was going to consist of a crash program to sequence the genome end-to-end: start with letter number one and, ten or twenty years later, end with letter number three billion. Then you would have—Ta-da!—a meaningless string of letters. Well, not quite meaningless. You *might* be able to discern the beginning and end of genes, and even figure out what proteins they produce. But unless the sequencing had been accompanied by various sorts of complementary research, you would have a hard time figuring out which genes did what. Besides, sequencing is both oppressively boring and hugely expensive. It's done not by scientists, but by machines and technicians. (The British biologist Sidney Brenner suggested that a penal colony would be a good place to base the project.) And sequencing a single "base pair"—one letter's worth of genetic information—now costs between one and five dollars, depending on how you do the calculating, which means it could cost millions of dollars to sequence a single large gene. That's a lot to pay for a twenty-foot-long eye chart.

In 1987, when Watson was selling the project to members of Congress, he and a few other leading geneticists were forging a compromise that brought a critical mass of support within the field. First, they would hold off on the crash sequencing for five years in hopes of getting the cost down to fifty cents a base pair. Meanwhile, they would focus on mapping—locating particularly important "disease" genes as well as insignificant but distinctive segments of DNA. These fairly evenly spaced landmarks would then aid in the location and sequencing of other genes. During these five years, the project would also invest in sequencing the entire genomes of simpler forms of life: mouse, worm, bacteria, yeast. In these organisms, unprotected by the ethical strictures that complicate the study of humans, and much simpler than humans, it's easier to locate genes and isolate their functions. Since evolution often uses the same genes to do the same things in different organisms, understanding these species should help in interpreting the human text.

That, at any rate, is the non-cynical version of how the genome project earned the respect of the finest minds in genetics. The cynical version—now being circulated by some of the project's opponents—is pork barrel politics. The most commonly cited example is David Botstein (now at Genentech and soon to be at Stanford), who was among the most prominent and vocal early critics of the human genome project. Botstein's main study isn't human genes, but yeast genes. Thus, before the compromise of 1987, back when he was a critic of the project, he stood to get little or no money from it. After the compromise, which turned him into a booster, he stood to get lots—not just the sort of several-hundred-thousand-dollar grants that are the norm, but three, four, five million dollars a year for five or ten years: enough to found a small academic empire. The reason is that, because of his stature, Botstein is a likely candidate for one of the ten to twenty "center" grants. In particular, he is considered to have a good shot at bringing the "yeast" center to Stanford. There are other formerly critical geneticists who warmed up to the project once it was broadened to include their work. But all of them, Botstein included, can truthfully note that, by the time they endorsed the project, it made more sense in numerous ways than it had before.

Among the most important of these is the concerted effort to lower sequencing costs by subsidizing innovation. NIH grants are increasingly steered away from researchers who want to pursue particular genes with

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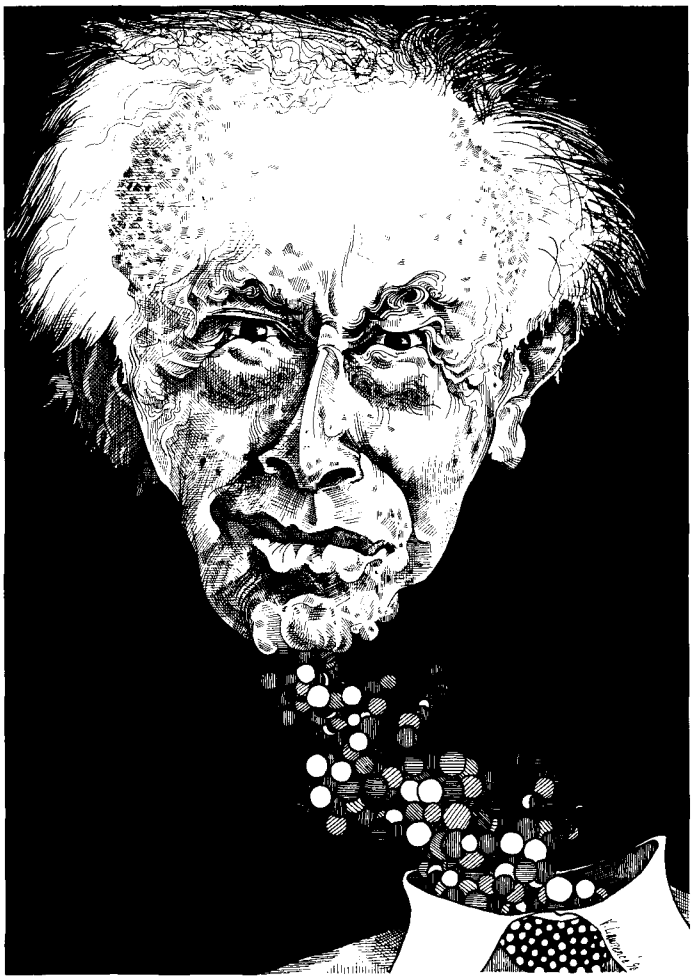
old-fashioned, plodding techniques, toward those with novel ideas. DOE's labs, meanwhile, are developing high-volume sequencing machines.

The emphasis on innovation is, among other things, the core of a de facto industrial policy. Right now only a few genetic tests are used by expectant mothers—for Down's syndrome, Tay-Sachs disease, etc. But the number of such tests is expected to grow, until, in ten or fifteen years, it will be possible to extract a fine-grained predictive profile, bearing on various diseases, disease predispositions, and maybe even behavioral inclinations. These profiles may be used by mothers-to-be or—more commonly, perhaps—by anyone who wants to cut salient health risks through life-style adjustment; if predisposed to colon cancer, say, you might raise your dietary fiber-to-fat ratio. Anyway, if the diagnostic reading of DNA does indeed become a mammoth industry, and American companies and universities harbor the bulk of the world's relevant expertise, this could make an appreciable dent in the trade deficit. And there are a number of other ways in which the genome project might boost the GNP. This is the sort of thing Watson stresses when he's talking to members of Congress.



JAMES WATSON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

But there's something a little funny here. How can you sell genome research as an industrial policy—as something that will give us an economic edge over Japan and Germany—and meanwhile insist that the Japanese get more involved in genome research? Is Watson exaggerating the industrial benefits, or is he ill-serving the national interest in trying to rouse Japan to action?

The latter appears to be the case. The reason Watson wants Japan to help fund the project is that the information it yields will be valuable and globally accessible. He's worried that we'll produce the rows of As and Ts and Cs and Gs, and the Japanese will figure out how to make money off of them. This parallels the logic behind the American request that Japan pony up $2 billion for the superconducting supercollider, which will produce information that benefits science, and eventually technology, abroad.

But there's a big difference between the two cases. When the supercollider's boosters appear before Congress and list the technological spin-offs of building it, the air is always thick with disingenuousness. The truth is that almost all the project's value—intellectual or commercial—lies in the data flowing from the experiments to be conducted once the thing is built; that's why the requests for foreign assistance make sense. The bulk of the genome project's commercial value, in contrast, may well lie in the *pursuit* of the information—in creating the science and technology that will generate it. For example, the laboratory run by Leroy Hood at the California Institute of Technology has developed one of the world's two best sequencing machines, capable of reading 12,000 base pairs (one very small gene) a day. (The other top sequencer, developed in the European Molecular Biology Lab, is marketed by the Swedish firm LKB.) These machines are already valuable enough for scientific purposes so that Applied Biosystems, which is marketing the Hood machine, has sold hundreds of them at around $100,000 apiece. And, though genetic diagnosis doesn't commonly entail the use of sequencing technology, there is a decent chance that in ten or fifteen years, when diagnoses are more comprehensive, it will. Moreover, as Botstein has pointed out, there's a whole range of ancillary technology—notably for manipulating increasingly tiny organic entities—that will find use in medicine. The point is that people like Hood contribute something to the GNP, and may in ten years contribute much more. So the question is: Why is Watson insisting that Japan get busy cultivating a lot of Leroy Hoods?

To be sure, a good bit of value *does* lie in the maps and sequences to be generated by the project; they will constitute a resource base to be used by academics and biotechnology companies for decades. But even some of *that* value isn't trivially easy to hijack from abroad. So

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The End of Insurance

The more we know about our genes, the less sense health insurance makes. The whole idea behind insurance is to pool uncertainty; since there's no way of knowing who will be stricken by what, various risk-averse people implicitly agree in advance that the lucky among them will help pay for the unlucky. Even in retrospect, the lucky ones don't mind this, because they realize they could just as easily have been unlucky. But the truth is that they couldn't have; to some extent—the exact extent is yet to be discovered—our future health is in our genes. This is true not just of the relatively few clear-cut, single-gene diseases, such as Huntington's chorea, but also of diseases toward which we're simply predisposed by one or more genes. Genes that incline people toward heart disease and colon cancer, for example, have already been located. As medical "luck" becomes more predictable, the enthusiasm of the lucky for subsidizing the unlucky should begin to subside.

The standard fear is that insurance companies will start using genetic screening to set higher rates for the unlucky or deny them insurance altogether. The standard reply is to postulate a new legal principle: your DNA is private, and no one can look at it without your permission. But a law this simple won't be enough. All insurance companies have to do is offer discounts for people whose genes augur well for their health, and who voluntarily give insurance companies a look. Charging them less means charging everyone else more. It may not even be enough for the government to *forbid* people from showing their genes to an insurance company. If people take a peek themselves, and the ones with the "best" genes want to buy little or no insurance against the diseases they're least likely to get, insurance companies that oblige by offering à la carte policies will siphon off customers from the ones that don't. And the companies that don't will have to adjust their rates upward to pay for their increasingly unfortunate clientele. In the end, the effect will be the same as if the insurance companies did the genetic screening: the unlucky will pay for their misfortune. (And never mind the paradox that the competitive dynamics of the insurance business, in a hypothetical world of *completely* predictive genetic information, would destroy the whole industry, by turning a health insurance policy into nothing more than medical bills on the layaway plan. Companies would have no choice but to follow the economic logic over the cliff.)

Asked to defend their interest in seeing your genes, insurance companies can invoke precedent. They already offer cheaper life insurance for women, since women, thanks largely to their genes, live longer. They also peruse family disease histories, and sometimes demand medical checkups, before granting insurance. This gives them lots of data—blood pressure, heart condition—that is partly genetic, and they sometimes use it to deny insurance or charge higher rates.

What excuse is there for thus penalizing people for their heredity? As things stand, there's no good argument on grounds of fairness, just on grounds of cold capitalist logic. But oddly, genome research actually gives insurance companies a new rationale—a fairly twisted rationale, maybe, but a rationale nonetheless. Consider how they now justify charging smokers more than non-smokers. People who choose to take good care of themselves, they say, shouldn't be subsidizing those who don't; that wouldn't be fair, and, besides, it encourages bad habits. OK, fine. But how do you defend charging higher premiums to people with bad genes? Here's the reply that will leap to the mind of insurance company executives, whether or not they have the nerve to utter it: once parents are getting a sneak preview of their fetus's future (a preview insurance companies will probably be delighted to subsidize), they have the option of avoiding that future. No, their child's cystic fibrosis isn't the *child's* fault; but it is in some sense *their* fault, so why should other parents help pay for it?

There are two hopes for avoiding all this mess. One is that group insurance will blunt the logic of the free market. Most health insurance (and about half of all life insurance) is paid for by employers. Their premiums are adjusted annually based on the previous year's payouts, so they, not insurance companies, end up paying for people with bad genes. Most employers haven't been as ruthless in holding down health costs as they might be; they regularly hire people—even people whose job skills aren't scarce—with, say, a lot of heart disease or cancer in the family. And, according to Thomas Murray of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at Case Western Reserve University, anecdotal reports of out and out genetic screening at the workplace often prove apocryphal. Conceivably, then, employers could become the guardians of decency in the genetic age. But don't count on it, if medical costs keep rising while the amount of predictively valuable genetic information grows.

The other main hope for keeping insurance humane is government intervention. One approach would be a ban against discrimination by insurance companies and employers. Perhaps simpler, in the end, would be for the government just to provide nationalized health insurance, which is worthwhile on other grounds anyway.

But this has its scary side. For once the government is paying the medical bills, it—no less than an HMO—has an interest in discouraging the birth of unlucky children. (And should members of Congress somehow forget this, taxpayers who choose not to have unlucky children may well remind them.) Probably this discouragement would at most be slight—say, paying in full for the abortion of "defective" children, whereas the normal rate of reimbursement would be 80 or 90 percent. But even in so subtle a form, such incentives amount to the government exerting systematic influence on the gene pool—in other words, a eugenics program.

R.W.

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far the people and universities that have applied for patents on diagnostic tests growing out of mapping and sequencing have tended to be the people and universities involved in the mapping and sequencing. And these have tended to be American.

Though Watson wants the Japanese to gear up their genome research across the board, the specific complaint that sparked his most embarrassing tirade against Japan was more narrow—in fact, downright petty: he was mad because Japan wouldn't chip in *$300,000* a year for the Human Genome Organization (HUGO), which loosely coordinates genome research internationally. So he wrote a letter to a Japanese official warning that if HUGO didn't get the three hundred grand, Japan couldn't be considered a "great nation," and could expect "continuing ill will and resentment." And then he pulled out his big guns: he threatened not to set foot in the country until it had complied! (This is known in the policy community as creating a perverse incentive structure.) Well, he still hasn't gotten any money out of them. But he did get their attention. One Japanese biologist told *Science* magazine with satisfaction that every time Watson opens his mouth, the Japanese government boosts funding for genome research at home.

The first wave of ethical messiness created by genome research is already taking shape. There is a twenty-eight-year-old woman in Canada who knows that she is almost certain to start going crazy slowly in a couple of decades, a victim of Huntington's disease. There are reports about an American couple who, after finding out that their unborn child would have cystic fibrosis, were told by their health maintenance organization to abort the child or lose coverage. The HMO backed off after hearing the word "lawsuit." But expect insurance companies to take a deeper interest in your genome as it becomes more enlightening—and to try to charge you more for insurance, or deny you insurance altogether, if your genes are inauspicious. Theoretically, if this logic is left to play itself out freely, it could mean the end of health insurance as we know it. (See "The End of Insurance," page 26.)

But the coming complication of health insurance isn't even close to winning the award for most haunting specter of the genetic age. That goes to eugenics. Biologists and ethicists have by now expended thousands of words warning about slippery eugenic slopes, reflecting on Nazi Germany, and warning that a government quest for a super race could begin anew if we're not vigilant. But the more likely danger is roughly the opposite; it isn't that the government will get involved in reproductive choices, but that it won't. It is when left to the free market that the fruits of genome research are most assuredly rotten.

It's not surprising that few people have noticed this. (Notable exceptions are Jerry E. Bishop and Michael Waldholz, authors of the forthcoming book *Genome*, a narrative account of the scientific breakthroughs culminating in the genome project.) Ever since societies came to frown on infanticide, eugenics programs have been public sector initiatives, all the way from the early 20th-century sterilization of "imbeciles" in the United States to Singapore's present financial disincentives for birth among the uneducated. But now we have the capacity for homemade eugenics: individual families deciding what kinds of kids they want to have. In fact, this discretion is already being used—mainly by the upper classes. As Arthur Caplan of the University of Minnesota's Center for Biomedical Ethics has noted, the people who use the relatively few fetal diagnoses now available are, for both financial and cultural reasons, concentrated at the high end of the income scale. So a form of bio-social stratification is already here; children with Down's syndrome, for example, are almost certainly being born disproportionately to the less affluent.

You can pretty well guess the next step in bio-social stratification: once we isolate genes conducive not just to specific pathologies but to, say, lower than average intelligence, we're heading toward a literal caste system. Only two questions stand between us and Brave New World: Will science find such genes? Will parents be so ghoulish as to make use of the information? The answers are: probably and probably.

As for the first question: skeptics note that intelligence, a trait of almost ineffable complexity, consists of many subtraits (memory, language skills, spatial conceptualization, etc.), each of which is influenced by (in addition to the environment) many genes. The idea of an "IQ gene" is plainly illusory. On the other hand, one can imagine a fairly simple link between a single gene and a primary dimension of intelligence. Take sheer mental "quickness," for example: it's entirely possible that the presence or absence of a particular protein in the brain could markedly affect the rate of synaptic firing. And, even aside from such easy to envision single-gene effects, it's not at all unlikely that small numbers of identifiable genes together exert marked influence on various other aspects of intellect. Robert Weinberg, a noted molecular biologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Whitehead Institute, says, "Over the next decade, one may begin to stumble across genes that are surprisingly strong determinants of cognition, affect, and other aspects of human function and appearance." To deny this, he says, would be "hiding one's head in the sand." (Speaking of which: Watson's view on the question of whether we'll find genes responsible for, say, intelligence is, "You're young enough to think it's actually going to happen, and I don't think it's going to happen in my lifetime. So it's hard to get me to think about it." Sure is.)

Actually, Weinberg's prophecy may already be coming true. This spring two researchers announced the discovery of a gene that predisposes people toward alcoholism. They looked at cells taken from seventy dead people, half alcoholics, and found that the alcoholics were markedly more likely to have the gene than non-alcoholics. The small size of the sample gives some

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grounds for skepticism, but the point is that such statistical correlations are a perfectly valid way to substantiate a link between a gene and a complex behavior. In fact, although in this case the researchers were guided by prior knowledge of the gene's function (it affects the receptiveness of brain cells to dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in various addictions), statistical correlation can in principle uncover entirely unsuspected links. As genetic information about various people accumulates in the coming decades, its scientific value could be immensely raised by placing it all in a single data base. (The genome project itself will generate a fair amount of this data. There is no single generic human genome, after all—that's why different people are so different. So "the" fully sequenced human genome will be a composite sketch, drawing on thousands of human genomes.) The key to making this data base productive would be to pair each person's genetic information with other potentially relevant information—health records, psychiatric records, even scores on standardized personality and intelligence tests. (All names could be expunged to protect privacy.) As the data base grew, a sufficiently powerful computer could sift through it and turn up all sorts of suggestive correlations between genes and traits, which further study might then validate.

Question two: Would parents *use* this sort of knowledge? Would they go beyond merely avoiding things like Down's syndrome and choose to avoid things like "unexceptional intellect"? Maybe not, if this meant abortion. But within the past two years it has become feasible to examine the DNA of eggs fertilized in vitro. Just after fertilization, when the egg has multiplied into four or eight cells, one cell can be removed for testing, and the "pre-embryo" (a morally delicate phrasing) simply replaces it. With present tools, it would be hard to test a single cell for the presence of more than one or two particular genes, but that barrier will undoubtedly fall.

Imagine the situation: six pre-embryos await insertion in the uterus. The doctor explains that one of them carries Down's syndrome, and would probably give the child an IQ in the range of 40 to 70. The parents choose to discard it. And just out of curiosity, they ask, is there anything the doctor can say about the other children? Well, yes: assuming the child would live in a moderately rich educational environment, baby A's IQ has a 90 percent chance of falling in the 80-100 (below-average but normal) range; baby B's 90 percent range is 90-110 (average); baby C: 95-115; baby D: 110-130; baby E: 120-140. Well, um, Doctor, as long as we're being selective, could we toss out A and B, too?

In fact, the choices could be much more radical than this. For in vitro fertilization, women are given hormones that boost their egg production well above the normal one per month—to five, ten, sometimes fifteen eggs. (Of these, three or four are re-implanted after fertilization, since the chances of any one developing into a fetus are small.) So it would be possible to collect, fertilize, and freeze ("cryo-preserve") forty or more eggs in the course of seven or eight months, in preparation for a single re-implantation. Choosing four out of forty would mean skimming off the top 10 percent. With that kind of leverage, parents can afford to insist on higher-than-average IQ and broad shoulders as well.

Would a mother actually *choose* in vitro fertilization—now used to circumvent fertility problems—just for eugenic purposes? Would she spend half a year strung out on hormones just for the opportunity to make an anguished, morally momentous decision? I might have said no before I spent a few years in New York City, the ambition capital of the world. Each year thousands of Manhattan parents work up a cold sweat over whether their four-year-olds will get admitted to the best private kindergartens or merely the very good ones. And, for that matter, similar worries preoccupy parents all across the country. They spend millions prepping their kids for SAT tests, honing their athletic skills, and teaching them to carry a tune. Soon—conceivably within five years, quite possibly within fifteen—there could be an easier way.

In a recent newspaper article, Yury Verlinsky, an embryologist at the Illinois Masonic Medical Center who has developed a way to diagnose *un*fertilized eggs in vitro (a morally less complicated, if practically less powerful, technology than the diagnosis of "pre-embryos"), was quoted as saying that "we now can . . . make sure we give back only good eggs to women." By "good," he just meant free of certain inborn diseases. But the reporter, grasping the implications, intoned, "No one knows better than Verlinsky how such techniques might be perverted by tyrants and fools." Tyrants? Fools? No. Just your typical parent, sitting nervously in the bleachers at a Little League game. It is these plain old mothers and fathers—compelled by their genes to suffer silently with their kids—who are the source of legitimate concern, not the white supremacists in Idaho.

No doubt most mothers and fathers—even most who can afford it—won't try to have superkids. Maybe there won't even be one in ten, or in fifty. But it only takes one in 1,000 or 10,000 to create one of the grossest social issues ever—and, for that matter, to start a trend.

The politics of Brave New World aren't that hard to envision, at least in rough outline. Luddites on both the left and the right (exemplified in their extremes by Rifkinites and the Moral Majority, respectively) will want a fairly thorough ban on the new technologies: either outlaw pre-birth screening altogether (unlikely) or try to draw a line between tolerable and intolerable genetic selection: between, for example, physical and behavioral "pathologies" on the one hand (cystic fibrosis, Down's syndrome, manic-depressive illness) and mere "deficiencies" on the other (disposition toward emphysema, likelihood of a sub-average IQ, or of moodiness).

The smart money is never on Luddites; technological history isn't exactly an unbroken string of successes for

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them. Besides, in this case their laws would be hard to enforce, since the crimes they fear would be committed at the microscopic level, in the privacy of a doctor's office. Still, the alternatives to Luddism may give it a stronger than usual chance of political success.

If the Luddite coalition fails, we'll be left with a left-right split: between those on the right who want to let the free market work its magic and those on the left who want the government to provide enough money so that all reproductive choices open to the rich are open to the poor. The ugliness of the right-wing option is obvious: the social pyramid would grow taller and steeper, as some upper-class families added genetic advantage to their children's already formidable cultural advantages. The ugliness of the left-wing option is slightly less apparent but not all that different. This route, too, given enough time, could move the social classes further apart and radically reduce interclass mobility, with the lower socioeconomic regions inhabited by people whose ancestors—originally drawn from all social classes—had chosen not to use the new technology.

Some politicians might advocate a third path. There are people who think genes underlying intelligence may already be unevenly distributed across social classes. The theory, articulated by Harvard psychologist Richard Herrnstein in *I.Q. in the Meritocracy*, goes like this: given that (*a*) genes play an important role in intelligence, (*b*) intelligence plays an important role in economic success, and (*c*) people tend to marry people in their own intellectual and socioeconomic range, genes conducive to intelligence should drift toward the top of the pyramid. There are two common misconceptions about Herrnstein's thesis. One is that it refers to differences between races, and can be used to explain, for example, the disproportionate number of low-income blacks. In truth, its whole theoretical context—a meritocratic society, in which talent rises freely to the top—means that it emphatically does *not* apply to groups, such as blacks, whose economic progress has been stymied by discrimination and other barriers. The second misconception is that Herrnstein's argument is plainly implausible. In truth, his conclusion follows from his several reasonable assumptions with nearly the inexorability of a geometric proof. The only real question—a big question that may well doom his thesis—is whether there has been time, during the brief history of meritocracy, for an appreciable amount of bio-social stratification to take place.

With these two misconceptions in hand, some on the left have dismissed Herrnstein's thesis as a fascist doctrine, fabricated out of whole cloth for racist ends. But suppose genome research wound up supporting the thesis. (And again: the support wouldn't consist of important genetic differences between races, but between social classes.) Then the thesis might become a tool of the left. Some leftists would propose tightly restricting reproductive choices for most people, while broadening them remedially for families most handicapped by their genes. For that matter, there might be support for a different sort of remedial policy without reference to Herrnstein's thesis: genetic advantage to *compensate* for cultural disadvantage. And, actually, once you get into this unmapped policy terrain, it's hard to say how support would break down along conventional ideological lines. Though the right isn't historically known for its sympathy toward the poor, it has more than once revealed a warm place in its heart for eugenics.

Has this gotten creepy enough for you yet? Basically, all the non-Luddite options are so troubling in their own special ways as to inspire new respect for Luddism. But there is a very large problem with following the Luddite plan: the United States can't, in the real world, do it alone. Just imagine Richard Gephardt's floor speeches if Japanese parents are selecting for high IQ. Or if Singapore, say, actually *pays* parents to do so. In the absence of an effective international treaty (one with obvious verification problems) it will be hard for any nation to treat this issue sanely. It's enough to make you wish Watson would spend less time yelling at other countries and more time talking to them.

Note, by the way, that bizarre as all of this sounds, it is based on simple extrapolation; it assumes only the existence of identifiable genes, or small groups of genes, that influence complex behavioral traits in predictable—*statistically* predictable, not infallibly predictable—fashion. No new technological breakthroughs are needed. Such breakthroughs may, of course, occur. Thus, it could be possible someday to genetically *engineer* the sex cells; take eggs or sperm, or the union of the two, and fiddle with them until they meet your specifications. In fact, it is already theoretically *possible* to amend the human germ line; new genes have been introduced into the germ lines of mice, whose reproduction works basically like ours. It's just that so far no biologist has been sufficiently out of touch with reality to propose trying such experiments on humans. But the day will come when we're confident of our ability to intervene and not only spare a girl from cystic fibrosis, but guarantee that her children are spared. Once we cross that line, and face the possibility of inserting all kinds of genes—even entirely novel genes—into the sex cells, the issues raised will be much the same as those outlined in previous paragraphs, except with a lot of exclamation points.

Watson has done an impressive job of keeping concern about the social consequences of genome research well short of hysteria. His main initiative was a pledge to spend 3 percent of the genome budget—several million dollars a year—studying ethical and social implications. This has several conceivable rationales, ranging from judicious to clever. First, of course, it ensures that there will be abundant analysis of the various policy dilemmas. Second, it assures the public that everything is under control. Third, it can help turn down the volume of potentially voluble critics. Several million dollars a year is a lot of cash. It's certainly enough (even after a chunk is taken out for educational programs) to pay for all the truly worth-

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while thinking about genome-related social and ethical conundrums that's going to get done. And, at the risk of sounding cynical: it's also enough to give all the main would-be alarmists—the most likely candidates for the money, after all—a substantial interest in keeping the source of the money (the genome project) alive.

It's surprising, in a way, that all this has worked so smoothly—that Watson's sincerity hasn't been the source of more doubt. I don't mean he *isn't* at some level sincere. That 3 percent of the genome budget no doubt represents some real concern, as well as admirable political craft. It's just that there is a longstanding but suddenly awkward strain of elitism in his thinking that makes him vulnerable on this front.

Near the outset of *The Double Helix*, his 1968 recollection of the quest for DNA's structure fifteen years earlier, he suggested that DNA would eventually show "how the genes determined, among other characteristics, the color of our hair, our eyes, most likely our comparative intelligence, and maybe even our potential to amuse others," and he then spent the rest of the book making it clear that he doesn't have a lot of time for those whose genes aren't conducive to intelligence and liveliness. Maurice Wilkins, the British scientist who was beaten by Watson and Crick in the race for DNA but shared the Nobel Prize with them, once summarized the content of *The Double Helix* as "I'm Jim, I'm smart, most of the time Francis is smart too, the rest are bloody clots." You don't have to read between the lines to pick that up. Watson observes, for example, that "a goodly number of scientists are not only narrow-minded and dull, but also just stupid." And then there is the scene early in the book where, in angling for a way to hook up with Crick, Watson considers using his attractive sister as bait. "For years I had sullenly watched Elizabeth being pursued by a series of dull nitwits. Suddenly the possibility opened up that her way of life could be changed. No longer did I have to face the certainty that she would end up with a mental defective." Of course, Watson is kidding here. Moreover, the sentiment behind the joke, and behind the term "mental defective," probably doesn't distinguish him from a lot of other brilliant people. Still, the utterance of it does, and it's an unfortunate choice of words, given his present job description.

Also to be found within *The Double Helix* are clues to Watson's surprising success in positions of leadership. What people usually remember about the book is Watson as enfant terrible: roaming the hallowed halls of Cambridge with open disdain for British niceties, unabashedly plotting to win the Nobel Prize, rejoicing in the missteps of senior colleagues who are also on DNA's trail, making assorted nasty judgments about people, slyly ascribing ignoble motives to them, and just being generally mean. One biologist recently asked me, rhetorically, "Do you think the author of that book is a man who should be running a $200 million a year government program?" Well, yes, in a sense. Beneath the book's bravado and cruelty is a view of human nature that is crystalline in its cynicism. This man has no illusions about why people do things or how the world works. He is the kind of person who could size up a political challenge—say, how to get a bunch of molecular biologists to support a big program and then extract the necessary funds from Congress and wind up running it—and come up with a good plan.

Could he execute such plans more smoothly if his social skills were more adroit and he had a keener sense for when to keep his mouth shut? Probably; his line about "calculated madness"—the intimation that his various indiscretions serve some purpose opaque to mere mortals—is probably nonsense. But if he weren't such an oddball, he wouldn't have such a detached perspective, and he might not understand people well enough to devise good plans in the first place.

Watson's political skill now faces a new test. For the first time since he took office, the genome project is encountering real trouble from within molecular biology. It started in the hinterland this spring, when the University of Utah's Martin Rechsteiner and Michael Syvanen at the University of California, Davis, separately dispatched their doubts about the project over BioNet, a computer network that links the nation's molecular biology labs. By mid-June the rebellion had gotten respectable, as most members of Harvard's department of microbiology and molecular genetics endorsed a critical reassessment of the project written by Bernard Davis and submitted to *Science*.

This round of opposition is reminiscent of the first round, the one overcome in 1987. Once again, resistance is coming mainly from people whose line of research gets no genome money. And once again a principal argument is that there's little purely scientific value in sequencing the genome if you don't understand how it works. A point being stressed this time around is that one of the best ways to shed light on the genes is through "top-down" inquiry. This means starting by studying biochemical mechanics, and then following them back to their genetic origins: figuring out, for example, what proteins (or protein deficiencies) are involved in a certain disease and then tracing them to the genes that produce them (or fail to). This is how a gene predisposing people to high levels of cholesterol, and therefore to heart disease, was found. For other complex diseases—such as cancer, a far more prolific killer than cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease, et al.—this tack may be comparably fruitful.

And it is top-down research that has paved the way for the first experiment in human gene therapy—actually altering the genes in certain pathological cells (an alteration that isn't passed on to future generations). The experiment, scheduled for later this year, is designed to cure an extremely rare immune deficiency disease, but if gene therapy fulfills everyone's hopes and becomes a weapon against cancer and heart disease, it will literally revolutionize health care. Now, the genome project will also, by itself, aid the search for genetic therapies. Moreover, top-down research as a

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whole will certainly benefit from a fully sequenced genome; one of the main arguments for the project is that it will eventually produce a resource of service to all of biology. But in the meantime, top-down research is getting little support from the project.

This grievance is given its edge by a scarcity of NIH funds. The sources of the problem are several, including federal budgetary austerity and the diversion of resources into AIDS research (more resources than can be well used, many feel). Whether the genome project is also one of the culprits, as critics claim, depends on how successful the "Apollo moon-shot" marketing tack has been. Watson's defenders claim he has succeeded in turning NIH funding into a non-zero-sum game, convincing Congress to consider genome research an isolated project, worthy of a special dispensation.

Maybe so, maybe not. But in any event, the biggest players in the genome project present the sight of feast among famine. It may be no coincidence that Martin Rechsteiner is within viewing distance of Ray White, another Utah biologist who is already above the million-dollar mark in genome money and is a strong contender for one of those king-size "center" grants. (Rechsteiner is himself amply funded by NIH, but he complains about junior colleagues in his department who aren't.) These centers, critics note, represent a stark departure from the sort of "investigator-initiated" mom and pop grants that have been the norm in NIH funding. The narrowly directed research they'll house is unlikely to spawn the sorts of serendipitous insights that have historically resulted from letting a thousand flowers bloom. And the centers invest so heavily in machinery and technicians that they don't do as much, dollar for dollar, to nurture young scientific talent as the mom and pop grants. (Though the genome project now gives out many small grants, the centers will eventually eat up half its budget.)

In an ideal world, the solution would be simple: leave the genome project's funds untouched and throw in lots more money for other promising projects in molecular biology. On economic grounds alone, this would probably make sense; molecular biology is a field whose financial potential is far from realized, and in which the United States still retains a dominant position—thanks largely to ample NIH funding in years past. The case for full funding can also be made, if more equivocally, on humanitarian grounds. Sure, the prospect of truly understanding the genome—whether through bottom-up or top-down research—raises a whole article's worth of nightmarish scenarios. But they are just the flip side of a lot of dream scenarios—the conquest of cancer and of heart disease and of gross genetic defects, for example. And it will be a pathetic comment on civilization if the world's societies can't arrange things so that the good that comes from genome research outweighs, at least narrowly, the bad.

But enough idealism; a sharp increase in NIH funding probably isn't in the cards. That leads to Plan B for quieting the critics, which is tried and true: buy them out using money from the genome project. Watson could simply set aside grants for top-down research that stands a good chance of shedding light on the genome.

The trouble with Plan B is that top-down research constitutes a large and amorphous part of molecular biology. All kinds of experiments, as the genome project's critics note, stand a chance of bringing insight into the genes. If the genome project were redefined radically enough to encompass these lines of inquiry, some in Congress might begin to wonder what was going on. They might even suspect that the project had been merely a masterful packaging job—an attempt to extract fresh money for NIH with the help of a new, snazzy name for a line of research (a suddenly expanded line, to be sure) that was already going on.

And, of course, the project *has* been in some sense a masterful packaging job. Nothing wrong with that, so long as it really succeeds in prying more money out of Congress. Certainly molecular biology deserves cash more than, say, those last two dozen B-2 bombers that will roll off the assembly line, and probably more than the supercollider. And certainly Congress has been at least as thoroughly deceived by the backers of these programs as by anyone at NIH. Still, conveying all this to Congress, as Watson would pretty much have to do, at least implicitly, before embarking on Plan B in a big way, would call for a certain delicacy of communication. Not his strong point.

Besides, it isn't clear that he would be willing to bring more people into the project if that meant further diluting its original mission and slowing the actual reading of the genetic text. If the project proceeds on its present timetable, the genome will be completely mapped and sequenced in a little more than fifteen years, when Watson is in his mid-70s. It would make a nice 77th birthday present: thousands and thousands of pages—ten or twelve volumes—filled with the definitive description of human life's immortal essence, an essence that Watson was the first human to grasp. Many great scientists have been honored with their own encyclopedia entries; Watson would be the first to get a whole encyclopedia. The question now being asked is whether getting this trophy ready in time for his 77th birthday will keep lots of promising and ambitious young scientists all across molecular biology from pursuing trophies that, taken as a whole, are more important than his; and, if so, whether Watson—who got this job partly on the basis of his ruthless intellectual judgment—can clearly distinguish between his interests and those of science.

In explaining his decision to accept the job, Watson recently wrote: "I realized that only once would I have the opportunity to let my scientific life encompass the path from double helix to the three billion steps of the human genome." Three billion—that's a lot of steps. But Watson is no stranger to climbing, and so far he's always gotten where he wanted to go. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Figures from the Past

Plainly the purpose of **Dick Tracy** (Touchstone) is fun. It must have been fun to make it. Hard work, of course, but even so, there must have been some fun in researching the comic strip since 1931, designing sets and costumes in key with the strip, contriving the intricate make-ups for Pruneface, Flattop, Lips Manlis, and so on. The setting—a large American city of the kind known only to the Hollywood model-makers of the '30s—the souped-up lighting, the preparation of pre-plug products so that cars are anonymous and beer bottles are marked "Beer," all these carry with them the implication of chuckles around the drawing board. Anton Furst's designs for last summer's comic-strip special, *Batman*, were seriously good; Richard Sylbert's designs for *Dick Tracy* are further evidence of the American man's persistent yearning for boyhood.

And the casting! The director, Warren Beatty, persuaded some high-powered types to play small parts: Charles Durning, James Caan, Dick Van Dyke, Mandy Patinkin. Two very big names consented to play supporting roles in weird get-ups that make them just barely recognizable: Dustin Hoffman as Mumbles and Al Pacino as Big Boy Caprice. It's all very chummy and jolly.

Here comes the antithesis. But. For the viewer there's much less fun. First, the screenplay by Jim Cash and Jack Epps Jr., authors of *Top Gun*, has listless dialogue and a plot that lopes rather than leaps—it isn't even a good camp version of a busy comic-strip plot. Second, Glenne Headly as the heroine, Tess Trueheart, has neither flavor nor humor. Third, Warren Beatty.

Possibly the strain of producing and directing this complicated picture took more out of Beatty than he was aware of or than anyone told him, but this is one of his least compelling performances, rote rather than dynamic, with none of the command that he showed in *Reds*, which he also directed. (Never mind *Ishtar*.) He doesn't even suggest Dick Tracy physically. Back when I was reading the comic strip, I and my friends assumed that the hero's features were modeled on Jack Holt, a film star of the day with a jutting jaw and crisp manner. The jaw is missing here, which, though possibly unavoidable, is like leaving out Superman's shoulders; and even the crispness isn't there. All through the picture Beatty seems—and sometimes looks—tired.

His directing is modeled on comic-strip, box-to-box visual variety, long shot and close-up, close-ups of explosions, odd angles to highlight objects. (Before someone steals a wallet, we see the wallet, huge, in the foreground, with the thief in the background.) Rightly Beatty leans on 1930s montages to cover time lapses—his face (or another's) in large close-up while a series of action clips are superimposed on it. These montages are, in fact, the best directing touches in the picture.

But the film doesn't answer the prime question in the mind of a past admirer: Why, after *Reds*, a considerable achievement in its acting and direction, did Beatty *want* to make *Dick Tracy*? The question doesn't arise just because he chose to film a comic strip: it presses because the film leaves it unanswered. We get no clues as to what in the comic strip made Beatty, one day in the past, say, "Aha!"

Hoffman is amusing in his small role, including a few parodic touches of his performance in *Rain Man*. Pacino, his face squeezed and his body distorted, does an enjoyable cartoon of the man he played straight in *Scarface*. Madonna is on hand—on just about everything else, too—as a nightclub singer and chattel of crime kings who falls for Tracy; she gives the part more sexy verity than the picture can bear. Another trouble is the contrast between the grotesque mask faces and the real faces side by side. Chester Gould, the creator of *Dick Tracy*, made an asset out of the contrast in his comic strip, but film is a very different medium, and the juxtapositions jar.

Perhaps Beatty couldn't avoid that trouble, but some troubles he made for himself, like the molasses music ladled onto the film. He may have thought that italicized '30s movie music would help to set the period, but Danny Elfman's hyperemotional score is ridiculous for these characters. Stephen Sondheim also contributed some songs. Bottom-drawer.

The last time I saw Louis Malle's **May Fools** (Orion Classics) it was called *Sunday in the Country* and was directed by Bertrand Tavernier. The pattern, not new when Tavernier used it, is the gathering of

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Longtime Companion. *Honesty and grief mark this drama of the arrival of AIDS in 1981 and its ravages through 1989, as seen by a group of New York gays. Craig Lucas's writing is oddly yet rightly bright. (Reviewed 5/28/90)* **Q&A.** *One of Sidney Lumet's better gritty-loving odes to New York. Drugs and police corruption and the fight for reasonable life. Excellently acted. (5/21/90)* **Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!** *The flashy Pedro Almodóvar, pulling his most daring stunt so far, by channeling his irreverence into an unlikely but warm romance. A porn star, a kidnapping, drugs, yet a happy ending. What nerve. (5/14/90)* **Without *You* I'm Nothing.** *A film of Sandra Bernhard's one-woman show, which is much more than a concert film of what is much more than a night-club act. Funny, sharp, intelligent. (7/2/90)* **—SK**

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a large family at the home of a family elder and the ensuing comedies and dramas.

In *May Fools* the gathering is occasioned by the sudden death of the matriarch. During the time that relatives and a few friends are together, we meet a cross-section of contemporary society—French, in this case—and we learn something about the values of the times. This reunion pattern can be useful, but like all familiar patterns, it has to justify its familiarity with its texture and insight—at the very least with some entertainment. Tavernier's film didn't do much along these lines, and Malle's film does considerably less.

The screenplay is by Malle and the veteran screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, who wrote much for Buñuel and adapted *The Mahabharata* with Peter Brook. The one touch of originality here is that this family gathering takes place in May of 1968: the student revolt in Paris impinges on the old family home in the remote countryside—in several ways. Malle also attempted to modernize the film by engaging the jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli to improvise on the sound track. But the music never connects with the picture; and the picture itself doesn't enlighten us one iota about the student revolt. As for the bulk of the story, the interplay among family and friends, it is tediously familiar.

So desperate is the screenplay for some kind of jolt or novelty that the authors even bring the corpse of the matriarch back to life—or "life"—in dream-fantasy scenes, which have neither symbolic nor emotional impact. They merely embarrass.

Michel Piccoli is the sixty-year-old son of the deceased old woman; he wants to continue living, as he has always done, in this big rundown house, and he fights to keep others in the family from selling it. Piccoli is ill at ease in a role with no touch of shadow or depravity in it, just a nature-loving simple soul. The teeth he flashes in his supposedly winning smile have never looked more false. The only other member of the cast worth mention is Paulette Dubost as his mother, the old lady who dies suddenly. Those who remember Dubost as the pert, flirtatious maid in Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939) may feel special pleasure in her still-perceptible charm.

Malle, for all his big reputation, has always seemed a dubious case to me. For every picture of his that achieved something (*My Dinner with André*), there are at least three that did not (*Black Moon*, *Atlantic City*, *Crackers*). Some of his films have been overrated merely because of their subjects (*Lacombe Lucien*, *Au Revoir Les Enfants*). It's difficult to think of him as a serious artist who has normal successes and failures. He seems rather an opportunist who grabs at whatever comes along and who attempts to justify his opportunism with an occasional serious foray. *May Fools*, with its modish sprinkling of politics on a commonplace script, is an attempt to combine both aspects of his being. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

End-of-Season Notes

Each June the League of American Theaters and Producers, and its accountants, declare the current Broadway season to be the most successful in history. This is usually less a judgment of quality than an audit of balance sheets. With ticket prices rising steadily, the Broadway box office is bound to break records, even with attendance dropping off. In the 1989-90 season, attendance showed a slight rise because the year included an additional week (without it there would have been a slight drop). Still, this year the league was able to boast not only about its bank account but also about the number of "serious" plays (not to mention the number of stars) to be found on the Great White Way.

The same bravado characterized the Tony awards. Almost all the presenting celebrities, beginning with Mistress of Ceremonies Kathleen Turner, had acted on Broadway this season—unlike the bejeweled and bespangled luminaries usually shuttled in from Hollywood to boost the ratings and the sequin content of the evening. And instead of those tiresome paeans to the glories of the Broadway musical, the focus was on the contributions of the Actor. Kevin Kline, Morgan Freeman, and Philip Bosco were actually given the opportunity to read some Shakespearean verse between production numbers from the nominated musicals and plays.

The evening was also salted with tributes to the non-profit theater movement for providing the "serious" product.

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Ron Silver even extemporized a salute to the National Endowment for the Arts for having funded three of the four Best Play nominees (the funding actually went to the theaters). As compared with the previous season, when *The Heidi Chronicles* had no serious contenders, the Best Play competition was unusually stiff this year. The winner, Frank Galati's adaptation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, was a hostage to its outdated source material. *Lettice and Lovage* was a compact car stretched into a limo to accommodate an outrageously campy performance by Maggie Smith (who won Best Actress in a Play). *Prelude to a Kiss* bobbed up from the depths of a mysterious premise to become a surface fairy tale. And *The Piano Lesson*—well, let's not get into that again.

As well as sharing the flaw of every award system (subjecting dissimilar creative acts to comparative standards), the Tony competition has a notorious limitation: it only considers Broadway productions. Testifying to non-profit achievement is all very well, but the Tony policy ignores the great body of work being done throughout the country, as well as much of the noteworthy off-Broadway material produced in New York City, unless marked for commercial transfer. Thus it is unsurprising that three of the most interesting plays of the season were either not nominated or not eligible for awards: Richard Nelson's *Some Americans Abroad*, Caryl Churchill's *Ice Cream with Hot Fudge*, and John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* (though the last arrived too late for consideration anyway). I've already reviewed the Nelson play; let me say a few words about the others.

Ice Cream with Hot Fudge at the New York Public's Newman Theater is actually two short plays, the second of which is as nourishing as the title. The opener, *Hot Fudge*, more a topping than a full dessert, is about bored rich people who meet around drinks at various locations, talking about money scams, real estate, image-making, careers—and above all, vacations. ("Where can we go where the beaches aren't full of shit?") Their accidie, which masks a dangerous inner discontent, erupts at the play's end with a violent spat between one of the characters and his ex-wife. *Hot Fudge* is only a sketch, but the machine-gun rhythms of Churchill's overlapping dialogue (which owes something to Mamet) outline the form of a forbidding spiritual emptiness.

Ice Cream is more substantial, consisting of ten short scenes in the United Kingdom, followed by ten short scenes in the United States. Within Annie Smart's perspective box setting, triangulated by a geometric green screen, an American couple, Lance and Vera, tour through England, complaining of America's lack of history and antiquity. The Anglophile Lance is tracing his own ancestry to Bristol. But when he meets a distant cousin, Phil, he finds himself implicated in a murder. Phil has killed his landlord and, with the couple's help, dumps the body in Epping Forest.

Back in their own country, Vera and Lance try to forget they are criminal accessories, until Phil and his sister, Jaq, pay them a visit. Run over by a car, Phil dies. The vaguely lobotomized Jaq steals a car from Lance and Vera and takes to the highway, "inciting temptation," encountering hitchhikers and survivalists, convinced she is in a road movie, meeting "interesting people." One of these—a professor who blames his wife for her failure to have an inspirational death—tries to rape her, and she pushes him off a cliff. By this time, Vera and Lance have become habituated to violent crime and invite her to stay with them. But Jaq prefers to keep on the move and, at the end, is preparing an escape to South America, which, she feels, already loves her.

Written in a terse, telegraphic style, the play is drenched in bizarre, occasionally psychotic dream imagery. Characters weave in and out of sanity according to their place on the map; geography and psychology are oddly intertwined. It's as if the play existed in the interstices between the scenes or in the folds between the hemispheres of the brain. Churchill insinuates her subtle politics into a stylistics of behavior, and, with Les Waters, her director, draws fine non-declarative performances from (among others) Jane Kaczmarek, Robert Knepper, John Pankow, James Rebhorn, Julianne Moore, and Margaret Whitton. The production jolts one's nervous system like a series of electrical shocks.

Six Degrees of Separation at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater is considerably less radical as a piece of writing, but it is still the most engaging thing John Guare has produced since *The House of Blue Leaves*. Claiming to have been mugged outside their building, a black con artist named Paul wins the confidence of a prosperous New York art dealer, Flan Kittridge, and his wife, Ouisa. Pretending to be a classmate of their children at Harvard, passing himself off as the son of Sidney Poitier (currently making a film of *Cats*), he dazzles the couple with stories of his father and his knowledge of Orwell, Salinger, and Russian film festivals. After being invited to dinner (he cooks the spinach pasta), where he delivers a moving oration on the virtues of the imagination, he is given the keys to the house. But when Flan and Ouisa discover Paul humping a male hustler in the guest room, they kick him out, learning later from their children that they don't know Paul from Adam.

Soon the Kittridges are comparing notes with other prosperous victims of Paul's ingenious scam: "The common thread linking us all is an overwhelming need to be in the movie of *Cats*." But the common thread is suggested more seriously by the title—everyone in the world is separated by only six shared acquaintances. One of these is an MIT computer hack named Trent Conway who, in return for Paul's sexual favors, had agreed to educate him into an eagerly sought-after young sophisticate. (This Eliza repaid his Henry Higgins by stealing his stereo, skis, and laser printer.) Paul, however, doesn't confine himself to manipulating the social conscience of the rich. He also conspires to steal the meager savings of a poor aspiring actor who commits suicide after Paul seduces and abandons him.

It is at this point that the play shifts its satiric sails and makes for emotional shores. Paul phones Ouisa to express remorse for the suicide of the boy. By this time, he is calling himself Paul Poitier-Kittridge ("it's a hyphenated name"), and Ouisa, motivated by concern and affection rather than anger and revenge, suggests he turn himself in. She offers to be a friendly witness when the police arrive but, caught in New York traffic, arrives too late. Paul disappears into the vast bureaucracy of the penal system. Since the Kittridges are not family members (they don't even know his real name), they're not able to identify him as the prisoner who committed suicide in Riker's Island. "He wanted to be us," Ouisa muses in an epilogue, "all we are in the world. . . . He did more for us in a few hours than our children ever did." By the end, recognizing that her life has had color without any real structure—rather like the Kandinsky painting that forms the visual metaphor of the play—Ouisa is ruefully acknowledging the randomness and emptiness that characterize her existence.

All this is delivered with Guare's characteristic wit and whimsy and goofy good nature. The play also contains some strong astringent commentary, especially when the liberal parents are being savaged by their yuppie kids. If it finally softens at the edges, well, a little sentimentality is understandable given the delicacy of the subject. *Six Degrees of Separation*, like David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, is a totally implausible story that happens to be true. Both plays are based on actual newspaper events. Unfortunately, both playwrights unsettle this reality by using what I call the Captain Queeg Maneuver—reversing our attitude toward a knavish character in order to accommodate an emotional climax. Still, Guare is dealing with important and sensitive contemporary issues—the extent to which the afflu-

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The See-Saw

"Of the remedies acting primarily on the body, the see-saw especially has proved efficacious, especially with raving lunatics. The see-saw movement induces giddiness in the patient and loosens his fixed idea."—G. W. F. Hegel, Zusatz to section 408 of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (tr. A. V. Miller)

Margery daw.
And up she went as I went down
And up she went and then I saw
The hair between her legs was brown.

Hold the handle with just your thumbs
And flap your fingers. Smile and frown
And giggle and sigh . . . we know what comes
Up must come down.

Up! and the end of the tip of me thrills:
Now I see over
The playground fence to the lovely hills,
The shadowy dales, the meadows of clover.

Down! and I bump . . . a hardened cough . . .
Against the place where I have a tail
(Do I have a tail? If I do, then they'll
Cut it all off.)

Mechanical Operations of
The Spirit oscillate between
The high of hate, the low of love,
As we have seen;

As we have sawn
So shall we rip, this way and that
Way, up and down, and my peace has gone
Off to war in a funny hat.

Two bolts on the handle dream of me
Like eyes (those very eyes I see
Saw something dirty they did to you,
Margery Doo)

A fulcrum with an idée fixe
(Hear how it creaks!)
Won't be shaken, *Balance is all.*
I'm unbalanced, a head-shaped ball.

Margery Dall:
I'd fill her up but my thing's too small,
She'd fill me down with her legs apart.
Every stopper gives me a start.

Here I come and she goes there,
Each of us President of the Air,
Slave of the Ground.
It's square that makes the world go round.

Toes just touch the ground, she and I,
Gravel and sky,
Balanced now in the midst of flight
Listen for yesterday, wait for night.

Something bad back-and-forth was there
Under Grandmother's rocking chair,
With his hanging weights and his swinging cock,
Grandfather Clock

Punishes Pa,
Ravishes Ma, and ticks the tock
Of now and then and the Time they mock.
Und ich bin hier und Margery da.

And she goes low and I go high
By an inexorable law:
See me be born? I saw Margery die,
Margery Daw.

See saw.

My wooden slope can't get to sleep,
The peaks are sunken, the moon down deep,
The desert damp and the sea sere
Margery Dear
I'm here there, and you're there here.
Margery Day,
Sold her old bed to lie on straw
To die on straw on the Days of Awe;
Margery Daw on the Days of Play
Goes up and down in the same old way

Und ich bin hier und Margery da
Tra la la la.

Out and down and up and back,
All comes on now faster and faster
When will I rest? and when will Jack
"Have a new master?"

I watch the light by which I see
Saw away at my wooden head,
Living or dead?
I haven't been told and I'll never be.

Who is it calls us home from play?
That nurse of darkness with Nothing to say.
One last up and down. And then
Never again.

JOHN HOLLANDER

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ent classes are obligated to the poor, the vulnerability of liberal whites to black mythologizing. If he hasn't quite seen these issues through to a convincing conclusion, neither has society.

Jerry Zaks directs the play like a satiric farce, with a snappy pulse that never lets the action flag. I'm not certain it's the best strategy for Guare's cinematic structure to keep most of the scenes anchored, regardless of the setting, near the same two sofas in the Kittridge living room. But the Newhouse admittedly is not the most flexible of theaters. Zaks, however, has managed to collect a very accomplished cast and guide them toward incisive performances—notably James McDaniel as Paul, John Cunningham as Flan, Kelly Bishop as Kitty, and, especially, Stockard Channing as Ouisa. Channing is that rare thing, a comic actress with genuine emotional depth. In this production, she is obliged to transform, in a matter of minutes, from a dizzy hostess into a woman of sympathy and sensibility, and the way she makes her mouth crumple and her cheeks sag is a signal demonstration of the actor's art. •

Lost Faculties

BY LOUIS MENAND

Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education by Roger Kimball

(Harper & Row, 204 pp., $18.95)

Roger Kimball is the managing editor of *The New Criterion*. *Tenured Radicals* is essentially a compilation of pieces written by him for that magazine. The pieces are offered as illustrations of the thesis that the humanities departments of "many of our best colleges and universities" are dominated by deconstructionists, feminists, and other "politically motivated" scholars whose object "is nothing less than the destruction of the values, methods, and goals of traditional humanistic study."

The book is clearly intended to give cheer to the sort of person who suspects that academics have set up a pretty nice racket for themselves—a system that enables them to reward one another for refinements on obscure (and, if it could be puzzled out, probably offensive) theoretical nonsense—but who doesn't feel intellectually equipped to go out and prove the case himself.

Kimball does everything he can to make this person feel at home. Figures from intellectual history are introduced (sparingly) in newsmagazine style ("Matthew Arnold, the influential Victorian poet, critic, and man of letters"). Contemporary theoretical dispensations—deconstruction, semiotics, "and kindred obfuscatory theories imported from the Continent"—are treated as though they were all cut from the same cloth; they are not distinguished among or defined. The reader is exposed to only as much actual academic writing as is considered consistent with a spirit of fair play: not until page 143, in the next to last chapter, do we read that "in the interests of thoroughness it is worth taking the time to consider in some detail at least one example of high-level writing in the humanities these days." And although the phrase "traditional humanistic study" is used repeatedly to name the activity under assault, the reader can feel free to understand it in any way that gives him satisfaction, since its meaning is never elaborated.

Further comfort is offered by the suggestion that the prestige of many academics can be explained simply by the avidity with which they have sought the limelight and its rewards. Geoffrey Hartman, for instance, is said "to have long since given up serious criticism for modish intellectual esoterica." (Elsewhere he is described as "a still-glittering cynosure of academic fashion.") Elaine Showalter is "obviously nothing if not ambitious." And: "Given the large material triumphs of Professor [Stanley] Fish and Company at Duke, one cannot help recalling that Plato also remarked the astonishing amounts of money that sophists make."

Most reassuringly, the business of refuting the views of these people turns out not to require much intellectual fine-tuning after all. A symposium talk by Paul Fry is full of "pretentious nonsense." A passage in a book by E. Ann Kaplan is "rebarbative nonsense." Michael Fried's analysis of a painting by Courbet is "ludicrous." Stanley Cavell's attempt to talk about Emerson as a philosopher is "simply ridiculous." Barbara Herrnstein Smith's writing is "self-important and intellectually pretentious," and her 1988 presidential address to the Modern Language Association is "blather."

In short, if civility and a willingness to put the best face on another person's views in the interests of seeing what might be learned from them are among the values derived from "traditional humanistic study," it is evidently too late in the day to worry about rescuing them. "I regret to report," says Kimball in his preface, "that the situation is far worse than [non-academic readers] are ever likely to have imagined."

The evidence assembled in *Tenured Radicals* is eclectic—three academic symposia; the ACLS pamphlet *Speaking for the Humanities*; an issue of *Salmagundi*; a 1986 essay collection called *Reconstructing Individualism*; the journal *October*; the deconstructivist movement in architecture; the case of Paul de Man's wartime journalism; and the work of Stanley Fish—and everything is ridiculed without discrimination. Responding properly to Kimball's complaint would mean distinguishing among the many trends he condemns so sweepingly—feminist criticism, cultural studies, deconstruction, leftist and *marxisant* criticism, pragmatist and "antifoundationalist" critical theory—and explaining the differences in their political tendencies and ambitions. It would mean, in other words, writing Kimball's book for him for the purpose of weighing the merits of what is presented as a blanket indictment.

It's simpler to examine the cogency of the indictment. The charge is that taken together, these new developments have politicized humanistic studies, and that they therefore threaten to destroy the traditional values of liberal arts scholarship and teaching. This is to be deplored because the "ideals of a liberal arts education . . . underlie the democratic institutions and social life of the West." Or in the view of Norman Podhoretz, which Kimball cites approvingly: "As the transmitter of the canon . . . the humanities have traditionally instilled a sense of the value of the democratic traditions we have inherited." This is, of course, a blatantly political claim on behalf of "traditional humanistic studies"; but that is such an obvious contradiction in Kimball's position that there's no need to pause over it. For he doesn't mean, of course, that the humanities have been corrupted by politics. He means that they have been corrupted by the wrong kind of politics.

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Nothing more is said in *Tenured Radicals* in the way of describing the tradition under attack, except that it is associated on several occasions with Matthew Arnold, who, Kimball explains, "had looked to the preservation of the best that has been thought and written as a means of rescuing culture from anarchy in a democratic society." This is a very coyly worded description of Arnold's thought, and if we unwrap it we can begin to see why Kimball has a difficult time providing more than a perfunctory account of the aims and virtues of "traditional humanistic study."

For Arnold proposed making the disinterested study of the liberal arts the centerpiece of higher education because he thought it might operate as a countervailing force *against* the tendencies of democratic society. Though he was willing to acknowledge its ascendancy in his time, Arnold regarded democracy as an intrinsically unstable system. He took its values to be the values of the marketplace: expediency and self-interest—"doing as one likes." Which is why, given the decline of the moral authority of the church and the hereditary aristocracy, he proposed culture—"the best that has been thought and said"—as a repository of values explicitly *not* associated with those of liberal democracy.

It is easy to see, therefore, that from one point of view the academics Kimball attacks are fulfilling (though in the name of rather different ideals) Arnold's prescription. They are providing intellectual resistance to an easy acceptance of the assumptions and pieties—the "what goes without saying"—of contemporary society. The notion that the function of a liberal arts education ought to be to teach and affirm the values of bourgeois liberal democracy isn't just simplistic; it's a radical revision of the theory of higher education as it has been understood since Arnold's time.

If professors in the humanities were required to produce syllabi conducive to instilling "a sense of the value of the democratic traditions we have inherited," they could not teach Eliot, or Yeats, or Dostoyevsky, or Flaubert, or Balzac, or Coleridge, or Blake, or Shakespeare, or Dante. They could not teach Plato, or Augustine, or Nietzsche. There are writers in the canon who can be said to articulate the values of liberal societies, of course; but there are many more writers who are great haters of those values.

That hatred ought not to be discounted (though it often is) in the interests of pursuing the "universal human truth" in the work being studied. For it has everything to do with the respect lib-

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eral society pays to intellectual culture. What would be the point of enshrining the study of culture as we do—or of supporting the production of new art and literature through agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts—and of constructing elaborate legal and institutional machinery to guarantee the freedom of those activities, if the function of culture and criticism was only to affirm the virtues of what everyone already believed? It is not a matter of teaching people how to give offense. It is a matter of teaching them one of the primary skills needed for life in the open society, which is how to *take* offense.

The real issue isn't the "radicalism" of academic culture, or the skepticism with which it views truths everyone else takes to be self-evident. The New Critics were radicals, great haters of industrial capitalism and the secular society, and I don't imagine that Kimball has a quarrel with them. The real issue is the quality of the skepticism being purveyed.

Kimball is not helpful in addressing this question, since he appears to have an indiscriminate distaste for everything that has come to his attention and little curiosity about what has not. Still, as exasperating as his book is, it is impossible not to identify at moments with his impatience and his scorn; and although I find the calculated shallowness of his treatment of the subject deplorable, I think he is right on one general point. He is right in believing that the quality of most mainstream academic criticism is poor. I think he is wrong, though, to contend that the reason it's poor is because it departs from the traditional methods and ideals of academic study. For I think that the quality of mainstream academic criticism has *always* been poor.

The reason is that the modern research university, an institution that in this country is only a little more than a hundred years old, was not designed with anything like criticism in mind. The whole system of graduate education and professional scholarship was built to service a positivistic model of knowledge production. According to this model, knowledge develops by the accumulation of research findings, brick piled onto brick, until the arch of knowledge about a field stands clearly defined against the background of mere undisciplined information. All the requirements and rewards of academic work—doctoral dissertations based on "original research," tenure review, publication in specialized and refereed journals, and so forth—were established to encourage the production of more bricks.

There was in the beginning no place in this institution for a critic, since criticism—the appreciation and interpretation of art and literature, and the drawing of moral observations from those activities—is obviously unscientific. The first members of the Modern Language Association (founded in 1883) were philologists—scholars whose work *was* scientific, and could therefore be evaluated "objectively." The campaign to introduce criticism into the academy was a long one, and in literature departments the end was not really reached until the late 1940s, when the New Critics succeeded in gaining equal institutional standing with historical scholars. It was not until 1950 that the MLA voted to add the word "criticism" to its constitutional statement of purpose.

But criticism became academically respectable, as Gerald Graff, Wallace Martin, and other historians of the profession have pointed out, not because the university was persuaded to modify its notion of what counts as knowledge, but because criticism was modified to meet the institutional requirements of the university. The solution was to make criticism theoretical. So long as the interpreter of a text could demonstrate that his or her reading was not a mere subjectivist appreciation by grounding that reading in a *theory* of literature or of criticism, then the interpretation could count as a contribution to knowledge. And since the era of the New Criticism, every new way of criticizing literary texts has earned academic acceptance by exactly the same strategy: by presenting itself as a theory.

The modern university system has produced remarkable achievements in scholarly research, an activity for which it is spectacularly well equipped. But mainstream academic criticism, if we take criticism in something like Arnold's sense, has been, on the whole, inferior to the criticism of literary journalists, social and political commentators, other independent thinkers, and academic mavericks—writers whose work is generally more widely read, more timely and useful, better written, and intellectually braver than the criticism produced in the academy.

For most of the academic world is a vast sea of conformity, and every time a new wave of theory and methodology rolls through, all the fish try to swim in its direction. Twenty years ago every academic critic of literature was talking about the self, its autonomy and its terrible isolation. Today not a single respectable academic would be caught dead anywhere near the word, for the "self" is now the "subject," and the subject, everyone heartily agrees, is a contingent construction. The politics of these trends (for many professors largely a matter of rhetoric) are sometimes vaguely conservative; sometimes—as they are today—they are vaguely leftist. Such switches are naturally distressing to people who hold strongly to the political views that have been forced out of style. But what ought to be most distressing to everyone is the utter predictability of the great majority of the academic criticism that gets published.

If Professor X is writing a book about vision in Romantic poetry, it is a safe bet that he will show how the eighteenth-century ideology of perception enabled a rhetoric of "sight" and "insight" that privileged a masculinist account of "nature," a construction that subsumed and thereby suppressed figurations of the female body. Major Romantic poems will turn out either to encode or to "deconstruct" this ideology depending on the particular segment of the profession X expects to win favor from. Twenty years ago Professor X's book would have shown how the major Romantic poets, through the metaphor of vision, solved a problem in eighteenth-century epistemology about the role played by the self in the act of perception. Someone is at work right now trying to figure out what Professor X will want to be saying twenty years from today.

Two things happened in the humanities during the last fifteen years to aggravate this endemic condition. The first is that the job market collapsed, nearly wiping out a whole generation of teachers and scholars. The narrower the range of professional opportunity, the heavier the investment academics tend to make in theory and specialization as a way of meeting institutional requirements for hiring and tenure, and the less room departments have for generalists and mavericks. Conditions are now supposed to be relaxing, though so far the only real evidence is a stepping up of activity in the academic star search.

The second development is more profound. It is that apart from the odd dean or provost, no one any longer believes in the theory of knowledge production from which the institutional structure of the university derives. Vast quantities of bricks are produced, of course, but they are simply thrown onto the heap. No one expects a wall to rise up. It is understood and accepted by everyone that Professor X's work will change with the interests and fashions of the times, and in fact some people have already built careers by theorizing about the inevitability of that phenomenon.

When the philosophy of an institution

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loses the credence of the people who work there, the result is corruption; and the humanities departments in the contemporary university, so far as their intellectual mission is concerned, seem to me to be completely corrupt. Of course decisions to reward one kind of work over another are made in good faith—but faith in what? In the permanent intellectual underpinnings of one's discipline? Or in the knowledge that if I play fairly with you, you can be expected to play fairly with me?

Criticism gets produced in conditions like these in the way toothpaste gets produced from a tube, and it's not surprising to find, as Kimball has found, a good deal of highly notional and unreflective thinking being passed around in academic circles. Nor is it surprising that so little of what gets passed around bears much useful relation to life as people outside the academy know it. That's the great danger of isolating criticism in the way Arnold advised, and as humanistic study has become increasingly professionalized, its practitioners have become less and less disposed to respond to any intellectual challenges except those presented by the work of their colleagues within the discipline.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the criticism that can be characterized as leftist. No academic discourse is more benighted by the obligation to theorize, and leftist critics have become so enthralled by their own account of the way discourse is determined that they can hardly find a voice to say anything themselves. There is the prison-house of language, and then there is the prison-house of "the prison-house of language."

The situation of leftist thought is symptomatic of the muddle of contemporary academic criticism generally. Most *marxisant* critics—like most feminist critics, most postcolonialist critics, most historicist critics, and so forth—have found it difficult to fit the antifoundationalist premises of contemporary theory together with the concrete political positions they want to arrive at in their criticism. Theoretically, most academic critics are committed to the view that meaning is unstable, that "the natural" and "the real" are culturally constructed, that the validity of interpretations is measured by their persuasiveness rather than by their proximity to "truth." So that trying to produce a politically correct conclusion by theoretically respectable means usually results in a transparent piece of rationalization. Professor X knows the conclusion he wants to draw long before the poems have even been selected—or, possibly, read. But that conclusion must be reached only after a thorough workout with all the major skepticisms of the day. Everything must submit to the interrogation of theories that are relentless in their subversion of certainty. And yet certainty began the project, and in the end certainty must triumph. If this is radicalism, it is about the most ineffectual radicalism imaginable.

No one is going overthrow an economic or political order—no one is even going to win an election—with the conceptual tools contemporary academic criticism makes available. The term "phallocentrism," for instance, nearly ubiquitous at last year's MLA convention, is one of those ideological power-words that give people the sense of having instantly explained something that offends them, and it is a vital part of the reverse-discriminatory stereotyping that passes for political analysis in a small but voluble segment of the contemporary academy. But the practical political value of the concept is virtually nil. To say that white people with penises are responsible for the woes of the world is a piece of cant, but at least it bears some loose relation to the facts of world history since the rise of capitalism. But to say that white people with penises are responsible for the world's woes *because they have penises* is like saying that intellectuals are a social menace because they have heads. The interest of the concept is purely theoretical, and to equip people honestly wishing to alleviate social injustice with it is a disservice—unless you are hoping that they will institute a new Reign of Terror (with much smaller guillotines).

What concerns Kimball and like-minded critics of the academy most is not what gets circulated at the conventions and in the professional journals, but what gets circulated in the classroom. The fear is that the "patrimony" (Podhoretz's term, quoted by Kimball) of Western culture will be lost if the canon and the traditional methods of teaching it are abandoned. But what is the traditional method of teaching in the humanities? Like the graduate student, the undergraduate in the humanities is compelled to adhere to an institutional scheme devised to service the hard sciences. The cornerstone of undergraduate education is the major: a college student must follow a course of study that amounts to preprofessional training in a discipline. Requirements for majoring in chemistry or physics or English are established so that the student who shows the most promise of being able to produce the kind of work being done by his teachers—by people already in the

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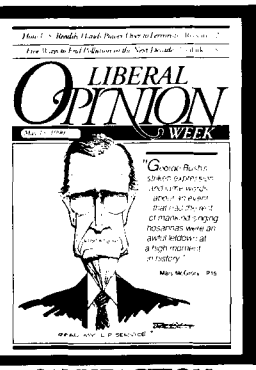

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profession—will be the most highly rewarded.

This makes sense for the chemistry major, who is likely to go on to medical school, and the physics major, who is likely to become an engineer or a research scientist. The English major, though, is likely to go to law school or business school, to get into publishing or journalism, to become a social worker or a civil servant—to do almost anything, in short, except enroll in graduate school and become an English professor. What is the point of training such a student to be a proto-specialist in some academic field? It's certainly not practical, and it's hard to see that it's the most intellectually enriching way to learn about literature, either.

It is sometimes argued that learning a discipline is a good in itself: it teaches the virtues of undertaking a thorough course of study, of really learning something, no matter what the subject matter. But this rationale contradicts the original purpose of modern university education; for it is a version of the doctrine of "mental discipline" that was used in the early nineteenth century to explain why students ought to spend four years engaged in translating Cicero into Greek and similar exercises. The theory of "mental discipline" is the theory of education that the modern university was supposed to make obsolete.

So long as undergraduate education continues to be divided up by disciplines, and so long as the disciplines undergraduates confront continue to be introductory versions of the disciplines that graduate students confront, liberal arts education will remain hostage to the research interests of the professionals. Since the earliest days of the modern university, people have complained about this problem, and have proposed to solve it by severing the connection—by making "teaching" a separate area of professional endeavor and achievement from "research." The idea is to encourage effective teaching by rewarding it professionally—for teaching has never been a serious component in the evaluation of a professor's performance. No one is hired, tenured, or promoted at a research institution for his teaching ability.

The trouble is that teaching suffers from the same disability that criticism once suffered from: it is impossible to evaluate reliably. Some professors draw large enrollments because they present difficult material clearly; some draw large enrollments because they artificially sweeten the material. And some professors believe that the best evidence of effective teaching is a *small* enrollment made up of highly motivated students, and make an effort to discourage the attendance of supernumeraries. There is no institutional consensus on these matters because there is no institutional imperative for finding one. The only model, again, is the model of the sciences: undergraduate teaching is effective if it produces competitive candidates for admission to graduate school.

By and large, talking about reforming the modern university is like talking about reforming a skyscraper. There's not much point in tinkering: you can knock the whole thing down, or you can go live somewhere else. There is one quality that seems essential if we are to have a valuable criticism, and that is independence of mind. It ought to be one of the goals of higher education to encourage independence of mind among students, too. It seemed for a time as though this generation of academics was committed to independent thought. New theoretical winds—poststructuralism, feminism, the new historicism—upset a lot of intellectual applecarts during the last decade or so, and that has been a great thing. For intellectual applecarts ought to be upset regularly, and the academy had accumulated a lot of pieties. No one should be sorry to see them go.

What is distressing, though, is how quickly all these new theories have set up for business peddling pieties of their own. Distressing, but not surprising. For until the academy frees itself from the grip of the professionals, it will continue to turn every new idea into an industry for pedants. The day university administrators start looking for new faculty who *don't* meet the requirements of the profession will be the day the university becomes a place where real criticism is produced. •

Levity's Rainbow

BY EDWARD MENDELSON

Vineland
by Thomas Pynchon

(Little, Brown, 385 pp., $19.95)

To find another novel that is as tedious, as tendentious, and as exhilarating as Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* you have to search far back through literary history, perhaps as far as *War and Peace*. The tedious part of *Vineland* is its plot, in which radicals and potheads of the 1960s replay in the 1980s their Manichaean struggles against authority. The tendentious part of the book is its historical myth, which explains the repressive 1970s and 1980s as a fulfillment of the secret wishes of the radical 1960s. The exhilarating part is its vision. *Vineland* sees American life of the last two decades in terms of a laconic American Indian legend of a period when no one dies, a legend that the book transforms into a vision of an era when the processes of life and death are suspended, when time stands still. The vision culminates in the moment when that era ends, death resumes, and life triumphs.

To reach the vision, though, you must work your way through the plot. In itself the plot is an unsalvageable tangle of improbabilities, but Pynchon almost rescues it through the intellectual and imaginative energy that he brings to the landscape, the culture, and the language that are the setting of each improbable incident. *Vineland*'s plot is often both programmatic and perfunctory, but its world is richer and more various than the world of almost any American novel in recent memory.

As in most visionary tales, the story begins in a comfortably familiar setting. A few chapters later, when the vision kicks in, this setting, like every ordinary-looking place in Pynchon's universe, proves to be a crossing point on the border between the everyday world and the realm of the mysterious and the miraculous. The book opens on the morning when Zoyd Wheeler is scheduled to perform the annual act of public craziness that assures the continued arrival of his mental-disability checks. It is 1984. Wheeler, the latest of Pynchon's passive and bewildered representatives, is an ex-rock musician around forty who lives a hand-to-mouth existence in the California redwood country with his teenage daughter. Except for his well-planned annual leap through the window of a friend's bar, nothing in his thoughts or actions qualifies him for mental disability payments. The worst that can be said of

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him is that he seems slow to recognize that the 1960s are really over. But the opening morning of the novel brings him "several rude updates." The loggers' bars have been remodeled and gentrified. The local TV station has taken it upon itself to choose on Wheeler's behalf the site of his public lunacy. And the drug enforcement agent who made his life miserable in the pot-smoking 1960s reappears with news of Wheeler's ex-wife, last seen a dozen years before.

These early chapters are vintage Pynchon, with all the comic extravagance that makes his books so uncomfortable to read while dressed in a stuffed shirt. Here again are the silly names, the dialogue marked by ungrammatical commas to indicate pauses and breathing patterns, the exact ear for elevated and demotic speech. Here also are dozens of interpolated lyrics, some tossed off by otherwise unmusical characters in the course of the action, others crafted by artistic sensibilities who share Pynchon's own indecorous high spirits. One such lyric is the advertising jingle for a lawn-and-tree service called The Marquis de Sod. It is sung to the tune of the "Marseillaise":

> A lawn savant, who'll lop a tree-ee-uh,
> Nobody beats Mar-
> Quis de Sod!

Also present, as always in Pynchon, is a breathtakingly sustained democratic lyricism. No other American writer moves so smoothly and swiftly between the extremes of high and low style, or accommodates so generously the shrill patois of the valley girl and the rotundities of Emerson. Pynchon even breathes life into that exhausted set piece, the poetry of the road. Zoyd Wheeler watches a punk band's van disappear with his daughter up a "thin, cloudpressed lane." Later, a car sweeps through Los Angeles

> among Olympic visitors from everywhere who teemed all over the freeway system in midday densities till far into the night, shined-up, screaming black motorcades that could have carried any of several office seekers, cruisers heading for treed and more gently roaring boulevards, huge double and triple trailer rigs that loved to find Volkswagens laboring up grades and go sashaying around them gracefully and at gnat's-ass tolerances, plus flirters, deserters, wimps and pimps, speeding like bullets, grinning like chimps, above the heads of TV watchers, lovers under the overpasses, movies at malls letting out, bright gas-station oases in pure fluorescent spill, canopied beneath the palm trees, soon wrapped, down the corridors of the surface streets, in nocturnal smog, the adobe air, the smell of distant fireworks, the spilled, the broken world.

Even at its most lyrical, the style of *Vineland* is less flashy than the style of

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Gravity's Rainbow, a book in which Pynchon created the illusion of switching from English to French to German in the course of a few pages written entirely in English. But *Vineland*'s style is more densely integrated with its emotions and less hesitant to speak in the voices of feeling. What is new in the style and the story of *Vineland* is a deliberately gawky tenderness for the ordinary. Pynchon writes with quiet affection about a modern backwoods America where building supplies are exchanged at swap meets and tow-truck drivers recall lessons from group therapy.

A similar affection informs Pynchon's account of Zoyd Wheeler's love for his daughter, whose name, Prairie, is a discordant 1960s artifact among the shopping malls of the 1980s. (Prairie's punk-geared boyfriend, named Isaiah Two-Four by his '60s parents after the biblical verse about swords and ploughshares, has devised a characteristically 1980s scheme for "violence centers" modeled on theme-based amusement parks.) The novel treats the relation between father and daughter partly as a détente between the language of two generations, and the complex harmonies of style established here extend back through two more generations before the novel ends.

When Pynchon reprinted his early stories in *Slow Learner* (1984), he wrote an introduction that all but explicitly renounced his first three novels, *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), and offered a prospectus for his next one. He recalled that his younger self had "come up with the notion that one's personal life had nothing to do with fiction, when the truth, as everyone knows, is nearly the direct opposite." His early work had ignored what he already knew, that the fiction "that moved and pleased me then as now was precisely that which had been made luminous, undeniably authentic by having been found and taken up, always at a cost, from deeper and more shared levels of the life we all really live."

The main plot of *Vineland* is built around a diagrammatic story of personal and political obsession that has little to do with lives that anyone has ever lived. But the relations between parents and children in the book, relations often tangential to the main plot, intermittently make *Vineland* "luminous, undeniably authentic," and give it a warmth that the intellectual exoticism of his earlier work excluded.

Zoyd Wheeler and his daughter Prairie turn out to be little more than observers of the main plot, which unfolds as Prairie seeks the secrets of her mother's past. The story centers on the mutual sexual obsession between Frenesi Gates, once a radical filmmaker at Berkeley, later Wheeler's wife and Prairie's mother, and Brock Vond, an anti-radical federal prosecutor who got his start in Nixon's Justice Department.

THOMAS PYNCHON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Pynchon performs much fancy footwork to avoid falling into the holes of this plot, but he never bothers to fill the holes because he has little interest in Brock Vond or Frenesi Gates as people. Vond is for Pynchon a local embodiment of impersonal and collective power, deluded by the belief that his acts are the product of his own choice rather than of larger historical energies. Frenesi, more subtly, is an embodiment of the impersonal collective wishes of much of her generation. The actions of both serve mostly to dramatize a single historical and political idea, the idea that the conflict in the 1960s between the radicals and the authorities concealed their shameful longings for each other.

Everything that happens in the story of Frenesi Gates and Brock Vond is designed to confirm Vond's intuition that the rebellions of that era were "not threats to order but unacknowledged desires for it," that the revolution of youth against "parents of all kinds" expressed a "need only to stay children forever, safe inside some extended national Family." Frenesi needs little persuasion from Vond to become first his lover, then his means of spreading distrust and violence among the leaders of a campus rebellion, and finally, under the federal witness-protection program, an agent in sting operations. Through all this, Pynchon is less concerned with her motives or feelings than he is in treating her as an allegory of the willing transformation of the rebellious self-righteous 1960s into the sullen acquisitive decades that followed.

Vineland's account of the past quarter century depends on the imaginative force of its historical myth, not on the analytic power of historical argument. Whether or not a reader believes the myth is probably irrelevant. What matters is whether or not the myth has sufficient resonance to make a reader willing to suspend disbelief for the duration of the novel. Pynchon's mythmaking succeeds, but only after the plot repeatedly brings it close to disaster.

Mythical history, as Pynchon practices it, is not a record of power and domination, it is a record of longings and fulfillments that occur on a vast archetypal scale. Figures like Frenesi Gates and Brock Vond can personify those longings, but they merely act out a struggle much larger than anything they can understand. In *Vineland*, the whole culture of the 1970s and 1980s is the fruit of desires felt in the 1960s for an eternity without change—for a permanent his-

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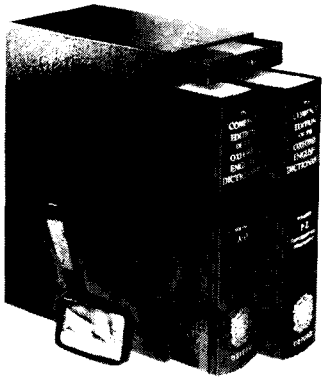

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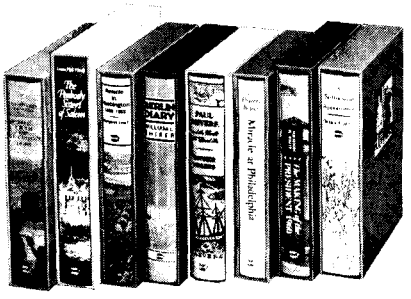

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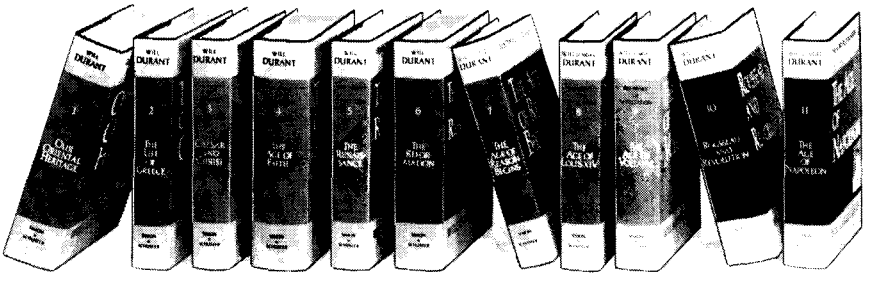

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torical love-death like the endless union sought by Tristan and Isolde. Rebellious youth yearned for the conviction that they "were never going to die" (a ubiquitous refrain among the young in this book). Authoritarian age yearned for unchanging certainties that would calm their fears of death. To escape from time and change, the young cried for a parental discipline that would preserve them in eternal youth, and the old were grateful to oblige. The result, in Pynchon's myth, was a brief historical interregnum outside both the sufferings and satisfactions of human time. At the end of *Vineland* this era ends, not with an apocalyptic upheaval, which would mark the end of time, but in a refusal of apocalypse, when human time renews itself, and death and life regain their dominion.

Historical mythmaking is a risky enterprise for a novelist, especially when the myth refuses to point a reassuring and accusatory finger at political groups that the novelist's audience dislikes. Even more risky is the way Pynchon's overtly feminist novel covertly adopts mythical archetypes: the young rebels are portrayed as archetypally feminine, the authority that they yearn for as archetypally masculine. But the historical myth of *Vineland* is cautiously disguised by the tone of the book, a glowingly nostalgic tone that suggests that the spontaneities of the 1960s were unambiguously admirable. The disguise is so effective that the whole myth seems to have eluded many readers who would certainly have censured it if they had noticed it.

The contrast between the achingly nostalgic tone of the story and the harsh judgment of its content is *Vineland*'s most calculatedly unsettling quality. The effect is designed to educate the reader away from the nostalgia that the book itself evokes. *Vineland* adopts the nostalgic wish of its early chapters precisely in order to expose the delusion and fantasy of those wishes later. As Frenesi Gates's story gradually emerges, it becomes clear that *Vineland* is nostalgic only about the events and situations of the 1960s, and that it maintains its nostalgia only as long as it neglects to look at the personalities that figured in those events. The 1960s wedding of Zoyd Wheeler and Frenesi Gates, recalled through Zoyd's memories early in the book, is an image of the peaceable kingdom. Pynchon waits a few chapters before pointing out, almost parenthetically, that the bride married the groom mostly because he knew nothing about her and her past, that she was on the run from multiple acts of sexual and political betrayal and from her direct moral responsibility for the murder of one of her lovers.

Pynchon portrays Frenesi Gates with the same unsettling contrast of tone and substance that he applies to the 1960s ethos that she represents. Virtually everyone in the book spends most of his time passively adoring her or actively seeking her. Her ex-husband Zoyd Wheeler tries to visit her in his dreams. Her ex-lover Brock Vond leads a private army in search of her when her file disappears from a federal computer. Someone else wants to make her the center of a film about the whole adventure of the 1960s. A reader can scarcely avoid getting caught up in the universal mood of admiration, a mood that persists long after it becomes clear that Frenesi's only redeeming virtues are a pair of legs that look arresting in a miniskirt, her "notorious blue eyes," and her ability to affect "the wide invincible gaze practiced by many sixties children, meaning nearly anything at all, useful in a lot of situations, including ignorance." Summarized in a review, this contrast between tone and substance seems stark and obvious. In *Vineland* itself, the process of moral discovery that Pynchon generates from this contrast seems as subtle and nuanced as the patient moral revelations in the late novels of Henry James.

Unlike James, Pynchon brings his most nuanced moral arguments to bear at precisely the points where his narrative seems most garish and unsubtle. The more the melodramatic language of *Vineland* casts Brock Vond as a sadistic villain, the more the logic of the action casts him as a partner in a dance of mutual courtship. Some readers, taking the tone for the substance, have complained that Brock and the other Justice Department heavies in *Vineland* seem disappointingly tame when compared with the real heavies who occupied the department under Nixon and Reagan. But like all literature that tries to make a moral argument, *Vineland* sees little point in placing blame on those who are unlikely ever to read it. It tries to discomfort its readers, first by agreeing with their self-satisfied sense that their unhappiness is the result of others' actions, then by quietly demonstrating that the actions that most afflict them are their own. The 1960s radicals (and the peaceful apolitical potsmokers whom Pynchon treats with sentimental affection) do not even have the satisfaction of defeating Brock Vond, who is defeated by his own side. Ronald Reagan, like a half-conscious deus ex machina, wakes from a dream and, by cutting Vond's budget, interrupts him in midvillainy.

Vineland's moral argument makes it a far more coherent book than the jumbled catalog of effects suggested by the reviews. But it is not nearly as coherent as Pynchon's earlier novels. One subplot reads as if it scarcely belongs to the rest of the book and probably dates back to a much earlier point of Pynchon's career. Shortly after *Gravity's Rainbow* appeared in 1973, reports circulated that Pynchon planned to complete two novels, referred to in his contract as "The Mason-Dixon Line" and "The Japanese Insurance Adjuster." *Vineland* is neither of these books, but the Japanese insurance adjuster—his name is Takeshi Fumimota—strayed into it anyway. He seems a bit lost. Some of his episodes, notably one in which he investigates a Japanese electronics plant apparently leveled by the foot of a gigantic reptile, are written in a science-fiction style that resembles parts of *Gravity's Rainbow* and nothing else in *Vineland*. The episodes in which he appears are given over to technological fantasies of the kind that the rest of the book disdains, and are void of moral or emotional intelligence. I won't bother you with details of the Ninjette retreat in California where Takeshi Fumimota recovers from the Ninja Death Touch inflicted on him in a Tokyo brothel by his American partner, a female martial arts specialist named DL Chastain, when she mistakes him for Brock Vond.

In its final pages *Vineland* breaks free from its miscellaneous plots and liberates its vision. Throughout the book Pynchon has glanced toward "another order of things," the same visionary realm that in *The Crying of Lot 49* he called "another mode of meaning behind the obvious." At the end of the book this manifests itself in a splendor both comic and profound.

Pynchon's vision is sacramental but not otherworldly. Instead of looking away from this world to one somewhere else, he looks for the hidden order and significance of the world he lives in. *Vineland*'s sacramental geography is a vision of a sacred place, the fictional Vineland County in northern California, the place that Zoyd Wheeler comes to recognize as a harbor of refuge, "Vineland the Good." This visionary Vineland occupies the real geography of the California coast from Crescent City to Eureka and the redwood forests nearby. But its name hints that it is an epiphany of that thousand-year-old alternate America founded by Norse sailors, who, unlike the sailors who founded the America we live in, never conquered the land or usurped its indigenous people.

The people indigenous to the real geography of Vineland are the Yurok, a

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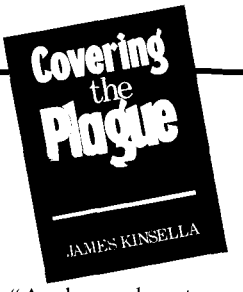
:ribe that figures in classic anthropologi-:al studies, including a psychoanalytic :ccount by Erik Erikson. Pynchon pauses in the middle of the novel to remember the Yurok and to look through their eyes toward the visionary past—the time of the *woge*, the creatures who, in Yurok legend, walked the earth before the arrival of humanity. In a ravishing passage a few pages from the end of the novel, Pynchon retells a Yurok legend that reads like a visionary distillation of the whole book. Brock Vond, after a desperate failed attempt to seize Frenesi Gates's daughter, is being driven away by the tow-truck drivers Vato and Blood from his stalled car (which, to his puzzlement, had been a helicopter a few moments before). Vato and Blood are the only two characters in the book who remember the Yurok heritage:

> As he drove, Vato told an old Yurok story about a man from Turip, about five miles up the Klamath from the sea, who lost the young woman he loved and pursued her into the country of death. When he found the boat of Illa'a, the one who ferried the dead across the last river, he pulled it out of the water and smashed out the bottom with a stone. And for ten years no one in the world died, because there was no boat to take them across.
>
> "Did he get her back?" Brock wanted to know. No, uh-uh. But he returned to his life in Turip, where everyone thought he'd died. . . . He was always careful to warn against the Ghosts' Trail leading to Tsorrek, the land of death, traveled by so many that it was already chest-deep. Once down in the earth, there would be no way to return. As he stared out the window, Brock realized that around them all this time had been rising a wall of earth on each side of the narrowing road. . . . And soon, ahead, came the sound of the river, echoing, harsh, ceaseless, and beyond it the drumming, the voices, not chanting together but remembering, speculating, arguing, telling tales, uttering curses, singing songs, all the things voices do, but without ever allowing the briefest breath of silence. All these voices, forever.

Although *Vineland* satirizes television so obsessively that some reviewers concluded that Pynchon no longer notices anything deeper than "Gilligan's Island," in fact the dust of the library rests on this as on all his books. Often it is in so fine a form as to defy casual notice. Pynchon found the story of the man from Turip in A. L. Kroeber's massive collection *Yurok Myths* (1976), where it appears as a raw unpromising fragment told by an unskilled informant. *Vineland* transforms it partly into the story of Brock Vond's failed pursuit of Frenesi Gates, partly into his historical myth of an era when America sought to live "safe in some



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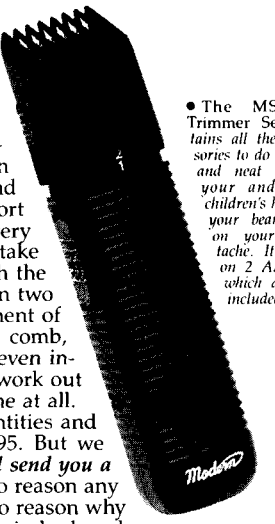

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time-free zone," exempt from death and excluded from life. The song of triumph that sounds through the prose of the final chapters of the book celebrates the end of that era and prophesies a return to the pains and joys of human time.

Pynchon gives a local habitation to the "time-free zone" by creating a skittishly comic group of persons called Thanatoids, who exist in a state between life and death. They are not as embarrassing as their name makes them sound. Pynchon writes about them with a deadpan Gilbert-and-Sullivan logic that accepts the impossible premise of their existence and proceeds to draw the inevitable consequences. His Thanatoids are not ghosts or ghouls, but ordinary men and women who happen to encounter considerable trouble with banks and credit bureaus because their heirs have a legal claim on their property. A large population of them lives in a place called Shade Creek, where they watch television and eat fatty foods because they can't think of any reason not to. In the Yurok story, no one died for ten years. Near the end of *Vineland*, the Thanatoids hold their tenth annual reunion.

Around the time of that reunion, in one of Pynchon's characteristic passages that take matters seriously by treating them as extravagant fantasy, the Thanatoids experience an exceptional night. For the first time, instead of staying up with the Tube, they sleep. And in the morning they all simultaneously wake to a promise of renewed life. They wake to

> a piping, chiming music, synchronized, coming out of wristwatches, timers, and personal computers, engraved long ago, as if for this moment, on sound chips dumped once in an obscure skirmish of the silicon market wars, expedited in fact by Takeshi Fumimota, as part of a settlement with the ever-questionable tracing company of Tokkata & Fuji, all playing together now, and in four-part harmony, the opening of Bach's "Wachet Auf."

To this music, "able to make the bluest Thanatoid believe, however briefly, in resurrection, they woke, the Thanatoids woke."

In these final chapters all the book's generations of the living gather for another reunion, one that joins the families of Frenesi Gates's grandparents. The older members of these two families are Wobblies and Hollywood left-wingers, bearers of a heritage of an alternate and unofficial America. Pynchon treats this alternate tradition as a matriarchal one: the novel traces the ancestry of all its women characters while treating the men as if they sprang directly from the earth. Frenesi's hatred for her newborn daughter, and voluntary separation from her soon afterward, violates that matriarchal line, just as her murderous entanglement with Brock Vond is a sign of what the book's historical myth regards as the betrayal of the true alternate America by the 1960s left.

After so thorough a betrayal no return or recovery can ever be complete. Zoyd Wheeler at last meets Frenesi Gates again—she is remarried with a second child—but her reappearance is a deliberate anticlimax. The book has other futures to pursue than theirs. The final sentence, which focuses on their daughter Prairie, traces a comic variety of matriarchal lineage, this one extending from the grandmother of Prairie's dog down to the dog itself, who has abruptly returned to the scene after his flight from Brock Vond's minions. The sentence looks like a cloyingly sentimental celebration of continuity, home, and love, until you notice that one of its subordinate clauses makes clear that its vision of renewal includes sudden violent death. *Et in arcadia ego*, says the ancient tombstone—death also is in Arcadia. And death makes possible the renewal of life in arcadian Vineland. The fugal interweaving of life and death in these final pages approaches the richness of Shakespearean comedy.

All of Pynchon's books are permeated by one or two central ideas: entropy in *V.*, the manifestation of the sacred in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and the bureaucratization of charisma, as described by Max Weber, in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In *Vineland* the central idea is less abstract than in the earlier books. A fall into an era without life or death, followed by a return to human time, is less a concept than a parable of personal experience. It describes in visionary terms a phase that can occur in anyone's life when all significant relations and events seem bafflingly distant and inaccessible.

What makes this vision luminous (to use Pynchon's word of praise) in *Vineland* is not the tendentious historical myth that attaches to it, but its intensely personal quality. Zoyd Wheeler's years of separation from his wife are his years in a realm without time, when he dreams of an impossible return. But he comes to recognize those same years as the ones in which he learned to value his daughter and their shared harbor in Vineland. This part of the narrative, lightly sketched in the margins of the brightly colored central plot, reads like an allegory of a lived experience of loss and renewal.

For all its silliness and longueurs, *Vineland* is the most troubling and exuberant work of American fiction to appear in many years. It is also the most personal work of an author who relied in the past on an almost anonymous impersonality. Pynchon still refuses to make his personality into a commodity available for packaging and distribution by a publicity machine, and still prefers his readers to attend to his books rather than to himself. Yet *Vineland* says more about its author than anyone could hope to learn from the photograph that is omitted, with honorable reticence, from the dust jacket.

EDWARD MENDELSON is professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University. His edition of the plays of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood was published last year by Princeton University Press.

Drool Britannia

BY ALAN RYAN

Blood, Class, and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies by Christopher Hitchens

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 398 pp., $22.95)

Winston Churchill—one of the tragic heroes of Christopher Hitchens's tale—dismissed a dessert from the dinner table with the curt command, "Remove this pudding, it has no theme." Hitchens is too lively and opinionated to produce a pudding, but he is an author in need of a theme. His brief history of the cooperative and competitive imperialisms of Britain and the United States over the past hundred years or so is a nice entertainment. It skips agreeably from the ghastly piety with which "Masterpiece Theatre" surrounds perfectly ordinary imports from

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British television to the curious and undernoticed fact that Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" is aimed not at the British, but at the American conquerors of the Philippines, and skips again to the peculiar ways in which Britain dragged the United States into two world wars and thereby contrived to defeat her military enemies while losing out to her savior and ally. As to how all this fits together, one may read Hitchens several times over and remain none the wiser.

If he doesn't have a theme, he has a target. The target of his book is the so-called "special relationship," and it provides a great deal of characteristically unkind fun. But it is scrappy fun. Hitchens's subtitle gives the game away: *Anglo-American Ironies* is a nice catch-all, but who ever supposed that this "special relationship," that any special relationship, is not full of ironies, and who ever supposed that the presence of ironies sufficed to pick out Anglo-American diplomacy from, let us say, most marriages, life at IBM, or a cab ride across New York?

If there is a plot here, an argument rather than a collection of witty and knowing prejudices, it is the thought that Britain has been uniquely implicated in the imperial seduction of the United States. At crucial moments in the American embrace of the role of a great power, British pressure made the difference. Even this thought, though, is ambiguous. Are we to think of Britain as the old sinner pointing out the tempting pleasures of imperialism to a younger and more innocent nation? If so, when exactly were the Americans innocent enough to need seducing? What of the continuous American pressure to expand into what had formerly been Mexican territory, and what of the longing eyes cast on Cuba, the West Indies, and Brazil by the slaveholding South? Or should we think of the British as luring the naive Americans into a competition for access to China, Japan, Oceania, and wherever else? Once again, however, it is hard to think that the Americans needed terribly much luring.

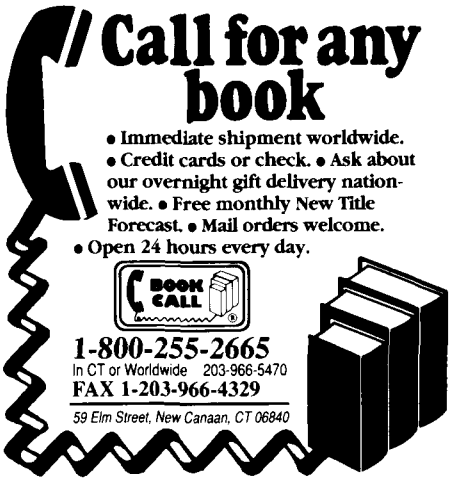
Or are we to think of the British as trying to use American industrial and military muscle to save the British empire and its unofficial penumbra in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, only to find, when two world wars were done, that they could no longer sustain the White Man's Burden and had to pass it over to their American successors? There's something to be said for that; but it, too, implausibly suggests that the British infected the Americans with the desire to dominate. Given the presence of oil, Russia, and Israel, the American takeover of the British role was, as the jargon used to have it, overdetermined. Indeed, Hitchens himself points out that the British did their best to keep Iranian oil to themselves, and were told off for attempting to muscle in on Saudi oil as well.

The book gets off to a good start by reflecting on the minor idiocies of "Anglophilia, Anglophobia, Anglo-Americanism, and Anglo-Saxondom." The provocation is the Churchill Foundation's presentation of its Churchill medallion to Ronald Reagan. The cast includes Prince Philip retelling the often told joke of his visit to the United States just after Churchill had been re-elected prime minister and finding himself congratulated on his father-in-law's success. The audience includes a curious mix of tycoons, entertainers, and politicians, among them Walter Annenberg, whose career as ambassador to the Court of St. James's never quite recovered from the moment he presented his credentials to the queen. In reply to a question about how he was settling in, he said that he was "subject, of course, to the discomfiture as a result of a need for, uh, elements of refurbishment and rehabilitation."

This foot-in-mouth pomposity leads naturally to one of the book's sustained motifs: the British ambition to "play Greece to America's Rome," to put a veneer of style on American crassness and vulgarity, and to siphon off a little luxury in payment. The idea was given canonical expression by Harold Macmillan while he was serving in North Africa during the Second World War. "We, my dear Crossman," he observed, in conversation with Richard Crossman, "are Greeks in this American Empire. You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans—great big, vulgar, bustling people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues but also more corrupt. We must run Allied Forces Headquarters as the Greek slaves ran the operations of the Emperor Claudius."

But that, too, turns out not to be a simple idea; its snobbishness and its self-interestedness have not gone undetected, and its costs to the British themselves have not been negligible. Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* comments unkindly on the "rich and suave secret legion" that had insinuated itself into New York to prey upon the natives, and forty years earlier Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* made it painfully clear that the cultural superiority that sustained the British in exile was a small consolation for something close to indentured labor.

More seriously, Britain had never been Greece, and the United States had had Roman aspirations all along. The thought that Britain should make the American empire a civilized and humane affair ran into the difficulty that Britain itself had been perfectly happy to play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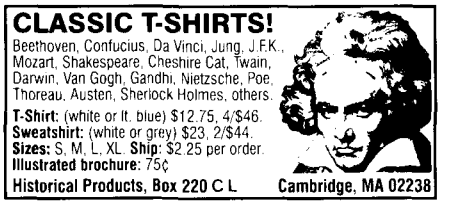
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Rome for as long as its military and financial strength held out. Civility had come a very poor second to power so long as the power lasted. In their imperial pride the British looked a long way back, to the Roman conquest of their obscure offshore island. They took pleasure in the thought that the obscure offshore island ruled an empire larger than Caesar had ever contemplated—in the spirit, for example, of Cowper's poem on Boadicea:

> Regions Caesar never knew
> Thy posterity shall sway,
> Where his eagles never flew,
> None invincible as they.

Seen in that light, the conceit of "British Greeks to American Romans" makes no sense. The only sensible story is the old story that Paul Kennedy has lately popularized. The idea of "imperial overstretch," the thought that all imperial powers take on tasks that eventually outrun their capacities, is very like the old view that nations have life cycles like individuals; the tired old lion hands history over to the vigorous young cub. Britain-as-Rome could make a tidy job of what was usually a very messy process and hand over power to America-as-New-Rome. (Arnold Toynbee often sounded as though he believed that; so, surprisingly, did Bertrand Russell.) The problem is that as an account of what actually happened over the past half century, or as a guide to what British statesmen and military men were after, the story of Old Rome yielding to New Rome won't do, either.

The end of the British empire, after all, was not the consequence of Britain's understanding that it was time graciously to pass the baton. The end of the empire was forced on Britain. Most of those concerned with the empire did not want to pass it on to neo-Romans, or to new Romans, or to anybody else; witness Churchill's famous insistence that "I did not become His Majesty's Prime Minister to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire." Moreover, those to whom the empire was to be passed did not like to think of themselves as having an empire. Just as Americans have readily talked of "class" as meaning "style" but fiercely resisted the idea that America was cursed with a "class system," a nation conceived as a decisive break with monarchical Britain could imitate, at least consciously, the imperialism of the mother country.

The large irony, then, is that Britain first hoped to employ American strength to maintain a *British* empire, but became "in practice, the political and military colony." But who is the joke on, really? "Is it," asks Hitchens, "at the expense of the United States, which has abandoned its affectation of anti-colonialism and been invaded repeatedly by English manners and English taste? Or is it at the expense of the British, who called in the New World to redress the balance of the Old and then found it was the New World doing the calling?" On the face of it, there's no question: the invasion of American suburbs by fake half-timber housing and unpersuasive pubs (a topic on which Hitchens holds the usual British views) is an infinitely less serious matter than finding your commercial, military, and industrial life substantially under the control of a foreign government. If there is a joke here, the joke is against the wretched British, who like the young lady of Riga thought they could ride the tiger without ending up as the tiger's lunch.

To offer any other answer, we have to return to the seduction theme, to the thought that America might have pursued a much less imperialist foreign policy but for the British entanglement, that America could have stayed out of both World Wars, and that this would have been inestimably to its advantage. Think what corruptions might have been avoided. Without British entanglement in the First World War, none of the racism and the nativism that accompanied the doubts about the loyalties of German-Americans would have sprung up. Without American troops in Europe, they could not have been diverted to fight against the new Soviet regime, and perhaps we might have been spared the worst excesses of American anti-communism, as well as the worst excesses of Soviet anti-Americanism. The argument spins out easily, and without end. Without the British entanglement, would the United States have gotten so embroiled in the Middle East? Without the British entanglement would the United States have thought itself the guardian of peace throughout Asia? And so on.

Hitchens never quite puts this somewhat submerged and pretty implausible thesis to the test. He invokes an assortment of emblematic figures who wanted Britain and America jointly to shoulder the White Man's Burden and to save the savage races from themselves, but since Kipling on the British side was neatly matched by Mahan on the American side, they do not quite fit into a tale of seduction. They do, it must be said, fit perfectly into Hitchens's catalog of life's little ironies. Kipling may have encouraged President McKinley to occupy the Philippines, but he was quite sure that America should never be allowed to challenge the supremacy of the Royal Navy; Mahan may have praised the Royal Navy to the skies, and reminded his readers that it was the Royal Navy's control of the Atlantic that allowed the United States a free hand in Latin America, but he was passionate for an American navy that could in a pinch take on the Royal Navy with some hope of victory.

It does not escape Hitchens that it wasn't only a matter of taking up the White Man's Burden that preoccupied Kipling, Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, Cecil Spring-Rice, and his other turn-of-the-century anti-heroes. They were decidedly keen to avoid the burden of Chinese and Japanese immigration into the United States, and looked to naval supremacy in the Pacific to keep the closed door firmly shut. This mixture of unabashed Anglo-Saxon racial solidarity in the face of Huns, Goths, the Yellow Peril, and "incompetent races" combined with the predictable Great Power rivalries whenever British and American interests ran into each other in Central and South America. While Woodrow Wilson could not rally the American people in 1914 around racial solidarity with the British, he was embarrassingly susceptible to such considerations, and as big a sucker for the British conception of government by gentlemen as a former president of Princeton could be expected to be.

Even correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt during the Second World War is surprisingly rich in the old imagery; at times of stress Churchill still reached for Kipling, and Roosevelt played the same tune back to him. Meanwhile, of course, American and British diplomats, generals, and politicians gyrated around the same old issues: How far ought the United States go in assuaging the British resentment that for twenty-seven months the British had held off superior German forces on their own? How much ought the United States to remind the British that they had done it with American equipment they could not have made or bought otherwise? How central to a postwar settlement were the British going to be? Were they entitled to a large role in virtue of their previous power or the usefulness of their experience, or were they entitled to next to nothing because they had next to nothing left?

On all of this, Hitchens casts a journalist's eye, not a historian's. Personalities predominate, and more than once the reader may well feel that a gossip columnist has seized the pen. Hitchens suggests, for example, that the British were partly to blame for getting the United States into Vietnam. His only evidence for this is that Dennis Duncanson, the influential British strategist, supported

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he American war in Vietnam and defended the postwar behavior of General Douglas Gracey, who used Japanese POWs and his own troops to beat off the Vietminh nationalists and restore what had been French Indochina to the French. The British army behaved exactly the same way in Indonesia, save that it was a Dutch colony that the British and their Japanese prisoners took pains to give back to its former owners; but Dunkanson's view that this was all part of an attempt to tidy up after the war, and thus to treat insurgency as a law and order problem, was surely right. It turned out to be absurd, of course; but much else did, too.

The one larger issue that does get raised is the issue of "receivership," or James Burnham's notion that the British empire was no longer a going concern, that its assets and liabilities ought therefore to be handed over to the American empire. Burnham did not flinch from the notion of an American empire; a former Trotskyite turned geopolitical conservative, he was not given to flinching. Churchill flinched, but only from a recognition of the decrepitude of the British empire; in somber moments he, too, thought that a self-conscious handover was what was needed. Of course, the whole idea was nonsense. The kind of hegemony the United States could exercise after 1945 was very different from what colonial powers had formerly taken for granted. Economic pressure, overt and covert bribes and penalties, military and economic alliances, these rather than colonization were the order of the day.

An irony that will strike the attentive reader is how tempted Hitchens himself is by Burnham's scenario. "If James Burnham's concept of 'receivership' had ever been made explicit, with the British being asked to disburden themselves of empire in a planned and graduated fashion and the United States moving to assume the said burdens with coordination and consent, there might have been some impressive results." Of course, Hitchens's point is that it did not happen, that "the history of receivership is a mixed history of improvisation, secret diplomacy, covert action, inter-Establishment jealousy, and military disaster." To anyone of even moderately liberal views, the effect of the postwar military alliance on British politics has been pretty awful. Apart from the discomfort of serving as America's unsinkable aircraft carrier in the event of nuclear war, British foreign policy has been a muddle, Labour governments have been objects of suspicion, and even of subversion, as if Britain were a banana republic, and British relations with Europe were distorted for twenty-five years.

All that goes without saying, though Hitchens does a spirited job of saying it. The curious thing is that Hitchens's first reaction to Burnham's vision—my own, too, and, I'd guess, the reaction of any Briton over forty—is not to say "how wicked" and start talking about the just claims of small nations to their own place in the world. It is to pause for a moment and whisper "if only . . ." Of course, one's *second* thoughts are with General MacArthur's "little people," who mostly want us Anglo-Saxons off their backs; but not the least interesting feature of this skeptical catalog of the duplicity, the cupidity, the self-deception, and the overblown sentiment that has marked Anglo-American politics in this century is its reluctant recognition of how attractive power can be. That is an irony, I'd guess, that the author did not intend.

ALAN RYAN teaches politics at Princeton University.

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

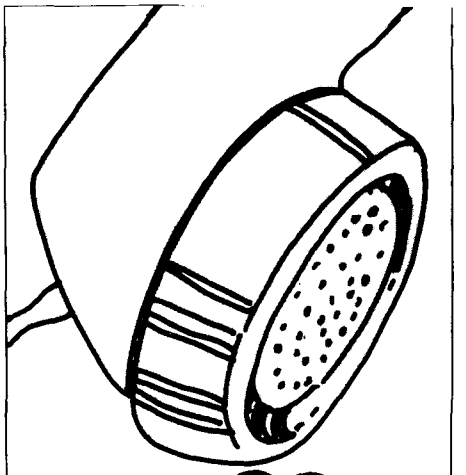
"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Lewis asserted that, among other things, Woolf's criticism of Bennett demonstrated "the old incompatibility of the eternal feminine . . . and the rough footballing principle—the eternal masculine." For Lewis, Woolf's complaint about Bennett's materialism was part of a Bloomsbury plot to apologize for and justify the "seasons of failures and fragments" (Woolf's words) she saw her own generation bringing forth. After Lewis's account appeared, Woolf wrote in her diary that she "had taken the arrow of W. L. to my heart: he makes tremendous and delightful fun of B. and B. ["Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"]." But she consoled herself with "the odd pleasure . . . of being abused" and determined to persevere.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD
Amherst, Massachusetts

To the editors:

How like Irving Howe to imagine that it was boring old Virginia Woolf who did in Arnold Bennett's reputation. The real culprit, of course, was Max Beerbohm, whose parody of Arnold, titled "Scruts," was published in *A Christmas Garland* (1912). Without belaboring the meaning of the title, I might point out that one line from the parody—"Him's a pudden with more scruts than raisins to 'm"—sums up Bennett's novels pretty nicely.

JIM HOLT
New York, New York



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MOSCOW DIARIST

Non-party lines

TWO THINGS ARE EVERYWHERE in Moscow this spring: lines, and the sounds of debate. At the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square the line is not so long as it is reputed to be; but not far away in Pushkin Square, in front of the largest and abruptly the most famous McDonald's on earth, a thick, still river of patient humanity folds back and forth against itself and then undulates out along the edge of the square, around a corner and past the block-long Rossiya movie theater, around another corner and past the Bauhausy *Izvestia* building, and around still another corner past the statue of the poet, until it disappears behind the trees. It takes four hours to get to the hamburgers. This McDonald's—a *real* Lenin's tomb—is built in the familiar roadside architectural style. But nestled against the gray Moscow buildings it looks as exotic and powerful as a gleaming spacecraft from some distant alien civilization—which, of course, is pretty much what it is.

A FEW STEPS AWAY, IN FRONT OF the dingy headquarters of the *Moscow News*, the lines are of a different sort. Though the circulation of this weekly paper, one of the most daring of "official" Soviet publications, is up around 8 million, the demand is far greater than that; so each week's issue is posted in glass cases along the building's outside wall. People are standing four deep to read the current issue, which includes an interview with Boris Yeltsin, a report on the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact ("with its critical internal conflicts, its economy in a 'free fall,' and its nationalities raging, the Soviet Union is perhaps the main potential destabilizing factor in Europe . . ."), and an article by Elena Bonner, Sakharov's widow, attacking the blockade against Lithuania. The wall next to the glass cases is plastered with samizdat, ranging from crude mimeos to the well-printed papers of the new Christian Democratic Party, the new-old Constitutional Democratic Party, and Sajudis, the Ukrainian nationalist party. An English-speaking kibitzer helpfully reads out a few of the headlines for me: LIFE AFTER GORBACHEV; LENIN WAS GUILTY, TOO; COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP OR PEOPLE'S POWER? In this corner of Pushkin Square, the crowds are so thick one can barely move, and the din of argument drowns out the noise of traffic.

IN PUSHKIN SQUARE THE LINES ARE more for spiritual than for physical sustenance, even at McDonald's. Matters are grimmer in the state-run neighborhood food store I visit. The Tagansky Gastronom is as large as a Safeway and is similarly organized: you push a shopping cart around, serve yourself, and then stand in line to make your purchases. To get into the place you show your Moscow internal passport (though the word "foreigner" works just as well). Scattered here and there among the gray, mostly empty shelves, some forty-odd items are for sale. A pile of cabbages (40 kopecks a kilogram) is the only nominally fresh produce, apart from some rotted garlic. Gory pigs' heads and skinny Russian ducks are the only nominally fresh meat, though there are also frozen Hungarian geese (two rubles per kilo) and turkeys (3.2 rubles). Lard, margarine, salt, cooking oil (50 kopecks per liter), mineral water (60 kopecks). Latvian sardines. Dark bread at 20 kopecks a kilo, white at 60. Yogurt and milk (40 kopecks a liter). Eggs, but you can only buy ten at a time. Sugar, but you can only buy two kilos a month. Not much else. Are the prices high or low? Judge for yourself: a ruble is 100 kopecks; the official exchange rate is six rubles to the dollar, the street rate upward of twelve; and a good monthly salary is 200 rubles. The wait at the checkout counter is around twenty minutes; but in a subqueue within the store for Bulgarian deodorant, it's more like half an hour.

THE DEBATE COMES AT YOU WHEREver you go. It comes from TV sets overheard through open windows, from taxicab radios, from boom boxes on park benches. If it's not Gorbachev's all-union Supreme Soviet then it's Yeltsin's Russian Supreme Soviet or Popov's MosSoviet, the insurgent-dominated city council. At least one of them seems to be on the air all the time, and people listen. It reminds me of the spring of 1965 in Cambridge, when the Beatles' *Rubber Soul* album was released and all you had to do to hear it was walk down the street, because everybody was playing it turned up loud. For a Westerner steeped in the democratic mythos this is very moving. But it's hard to find a Russian who isn't a little cynical about it, a little disgusted with all the talk-talk-talk. Still: they listen.

ALONE IN A FRIEND'S APARTMENT after dinner one evening, I watch the tube for an hour, zapper in hand. *Click* A costume movie, powdered hair and knee britches. *Click* A guitar-playing folksinger, blue and soulful. *Click* A documentary about Old Russia: onion domes, long beards, sepia tones. *Click* A talk show featuring a psychic who is apparently reading someone's auras; he draws it on a big sheet of paper after sculpting it in the air around his subject's head. *Click* Yeltsin speaking in the Russian Supreme Soviet. He is strong-voiced, emphatic, unhurried, and when he gets off a good line he accompanies it with a wry little conspiratorial smile. Unlike C-SPAN's congressional coverage back home, here there are plenty of reaction shots. Delegates yawn, read newspapers, whisper among themselves—though mostly they listen attentively. Yeltsin calls for a vote to fill some office, and the tally is shown on an electronic tote board that records not just the number of votes but also the percentages. There are six candidates; the winner of this round gets 38 percent, the runner-up, 36. *Click* A town-meeting-like discussion program, apparently about the upcoming Communist Party congress. The talk is animated, with people interrupting each other to make their points. Even if you don't speak Russian, there are so many cognates that you can catch the drift. The words rush by: capitalist Stalin perestroika totalitarianism democratic ideology multiparty Lenin transition . . . *Click* The World Cup soccer championship, live from Florence. Yeltsin or no Yeltsin, this has to be what most people are watching. The Soviet team is getting trounced by Argentina. During a break, a commercial for Adidas running shoes. Consumerist porn.

ON MY LAST NIGHT IN TOWN, I take a walk with a Russian friend in the Arbat, a famous old street that Yeltsin, back when he was mayor, turned into a pedestrian mall. Though it's late—after 11—dusk has only just begun to fall. The light is soft, the spring breeze caressing. The crowds have started to thin. We stop for a snack at a state-owned food stand. Everyone gets the same fare: two reddish sausages twisted like cheroots, some bits of boiled potato (slightly rotted but still edible), some flavorless red sauce, and a cup of watery red liquid that tastes of cranberries. We take our paper plates to one of the chest-high round tables nearby. On it is a glass filled with battered metal forks. We each take one and dig in. At a neighboring table stands a gaggle of very young Soviet marines. A stout old woman, the babushka in charge of busing the tables, shuffles over. One of the marines produces a half-liter of vodka in a paper bag. "Grandma," one of the marines says, "is it all right if we drink here?" The babushka's impassive face breaks into a smile, showing gaps between stumpy brown teeth. "Why not?" she says. "That's perestroika!"

HENDRIK HERTZBERG

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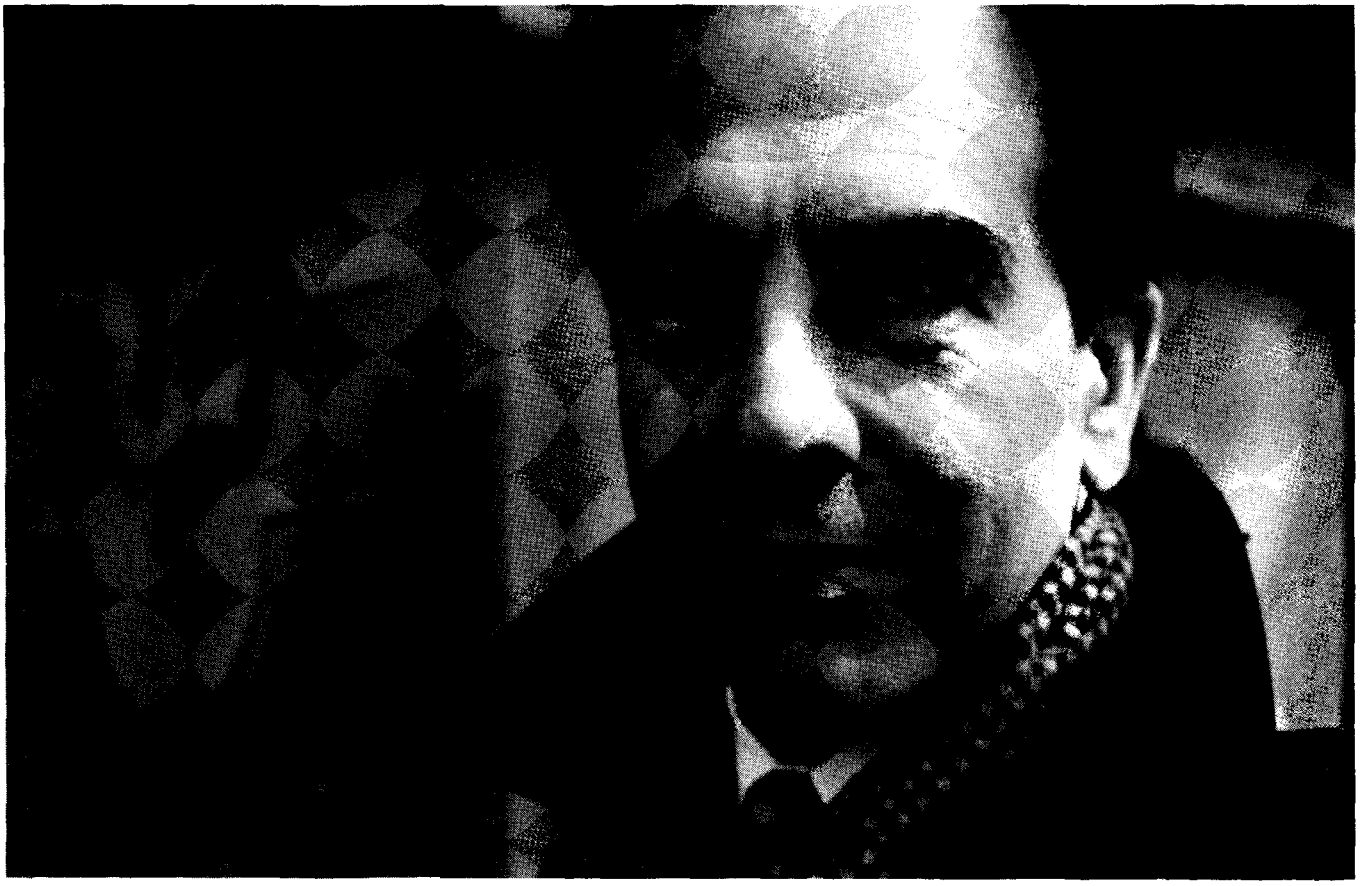

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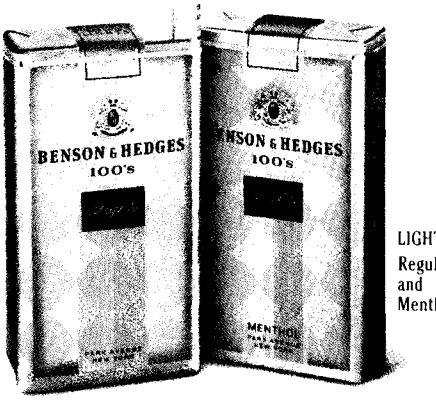

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